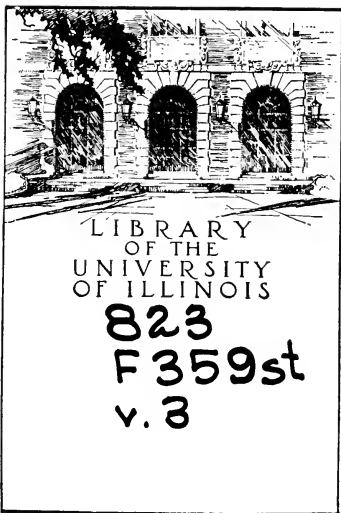


THE STAR-GAZERS

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THE STAR-GAZERS

VOL. III.

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THE STAR-GAZERS

BY

G. MANVILLE FENN

AUTHOR OF

'ELIS' CHILDREN,' 'A DOUBLE KNOT,' 'THE NEW MISTRESS,' ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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CONTENTS

—o—

CHAPTER I.

GEMINI, WITH MARS IN VIEW, . . .

PAGE
I

CHAPTER II.

THE STARS AT THE NADIR, 17

CHAPTER III.

A DISCOVERY, 25

CHAPTER IV.

STILL IN THE CLOUDS, 37

CHAPTER V.

PERTURBATIONS, 54

CHAPTER VI.

FACING THE UNKNOWN, 60

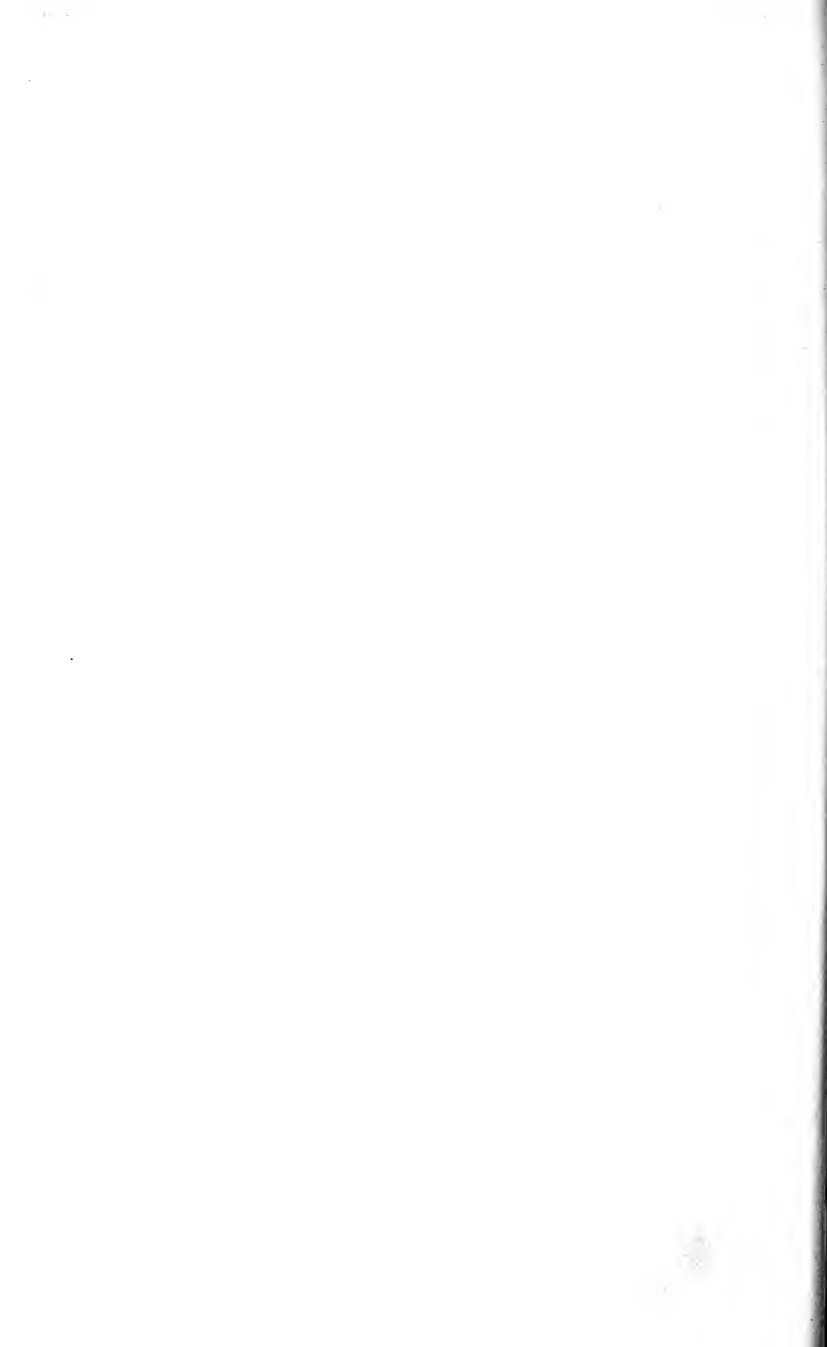
CHAPTER VII.

A PROBLEM OF CONJUNCTION, 67

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER VIII.		PAGE
THE FALLEN STAR,		75
CHAPTER IX.		
TORN FROM HER SPHERE,		83
CHAPTER X.		
THE LITTLE ORB TURNS ROUND,		92
CHAPTER XI.		
DRAWN TOGETHER,		98
CHAPTER XII.		
RE THE FOCUS,		109
CHAPTER XIII.		
AS THROUGH A GLASS,		129
CHAPTER XIV.		
FAR-SEEING,		141
CHAPTER XV.		
THE IMAGE FADES,		148
CHAPTER XVI.		
CELESTIAL MATTERS,		160
CHAPTER XVII.		
THE LAST LOOK AROUND,		173

THE STAR-GAZERS



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CHAPTER I.

GEMINI, WITH MARS IN VIEW.

WITH his grey hair starting out all over his head in a peculiarly fierce way, Major Day was standing and musing just at the edge of the wood, and a few yards from the path, very busy with one of those tortoise-shell framed lenses so popular with botanists, one of those with its three glasses of various powers, which, when superposed, form a combination of great magnifying strength.

Major Day had come upon a tree whose beautifully smooth bark was dappled with patches of brilliant amethystine fungus, a portion of which he had carefully slipped off with a penknife, for the purpose of examining the peculiarities of its structure under the glass.

The old gentleman was so rapt in his pursuit that he did not notice approaching footsteps till Sir John

came close up, making holes in the soft earth with his walking-stick, and talking angrily to himself as he hurried along.

The brothers caught sight of each other almost at the same moment, Sir John stopping short and sticking his cane in the ground, as if to anchor himself, and the major slowly lowering his lens.

‘Hullo, Jem, what have you found?’ cried Sir John; ‘the potato disease?’

‘No,’ replied the major, smiling, ‘only a very lovely kind of *Tremella*.’

‘Oh, have you?’ growled Sir John.

‘Yes. Would you like to examine it?’ said the major.

‘Who, I? No thank you, old fellow, I’m busy.’

‘Where are you going, Jack?’ said the major, as a thought just occurred to him.

‘Over yonder—“The Firs.”’

‘To Fort Science, eh?’ said the major, smiling; but only to look serious again directly. ‘Why, Jack, what for? Why are you going?’

‘There, there, don’t interfere, Jem; it would not interest you. Precious unpleasant business, I can tell you. I must go, though.’

‘What is the matter, Jack?’

‘There, there, my dear fellow, what is the use of worrying me about it. Go on hunting for *pezizas*, or whatever you call them. This is a domestic matter, and doesn’t concern you.’

‘Yes it does concern me, Jack,’ replied the major. ‘You are going about that communication which Rolph made to us last night after dinner.’

‘Well, hang it all, Jem, suppose I am; surely, as Glynne’s father, if I want to see the man who insulted her, and talk to him, there’s no occasion for you to interfere.’

‘Jack, you are out of temper,’ said the major. ‘You are going to make a—’

‘Fool of myself, eh? There, say it, man, say it,’ cried the baronet hastily.

‘I shall not say anything of the kind, Jack,’ replied the major good humouredly; ‘but let’s talk sensibly, old fellow.’

‘Yes, of course, sensibly,’ cried Sir John sharply. ‘You are going to turn advocate and speak on that telescopic scoundrel’s behalf. What the dickens do you mean by sticking yourself here when I’m going out on business!’

‘Tchut! tchut, Jack! don’t be so confoundedly peppery,’ cried the major. ‘Now, look here, boy, what are you going to do?’

‘Going to do? I’m going to horsewhip that fellow, and make him write a humble letter of apology to Rob. If he doesn’t, Rob shall call him out.’

‘Now, my dear Jack, don’t talk nonsense!’ cried the major.

‘Nonsense, sir? It isn’t nonsense. It’s all very fine for you, with your scientific humbug, to be making

friends with the star-gazing scoundrel. You fellows always hang together and back each other up. But look here, Jem, I'm not going to be meddled with in this matter. You have interfered enough.'

'I only want you, as a gentleman, to behave like a gentleman to Mr Alleyne.'

'You leave me alone for that, Jem. Insolence! The poor girl came home all of a tremble. She's quite white this morning, and looks as if she ought to have a doctor to her. It's your fault too, Jem, 'pon my word it is.'

'My fault, my dear brother,' said the major earnestly; 'indeed, no. I would not say a word that should interfere with Glynne's happiness.'

'But you did, sir; you did when she was first engaged.'

'Only to you, Jack. I did not like the engagement, and I don't like it; but I have always since I got over the first shock—'

'Hang it, Jem, don't talk like that, man. Anyone would think that you had been stricken down by some terrible trouble.'

'It was and has been a terrible trouble to me, Jack,' said the major quietly. 'But there, I have done. Don't be angry with me. Let's talk about what you are going to do.'

All this time Sir John had been moving slowly in the direction of The Firs, with the major's hand resting upon his arm.

‘There’s no occasion to talk about it that I see; I’m going to have a few words with that Mr Alleyne, and this I conceive it to be my duty to do. There, there’s an end to it.’

‘Well, but is it wise?’ said the major. ‘It seems that Mr Alleyne has formed a deep attachment to Glynne.’

‘Such insolence! A man in his position!’

‘And, carried away by his feelings, he declared his love for her.’

‘As if such a man as he has a right to force himself upon a girl in Glynne’s position. It is preposterous.’

‘It was in bad taste—a mistake, for a man who knew of Glynne’s engagement to speak as he did. But young men do not always think before they speak, nor old ones neither, Jack.’

‘Tchah! nonsense. There, go on and hunt fungi. Be off now, Jem.’

‘Be off? No; I’m coming with you as far as The Firs.’

‘What! Coming with me?’

‘Yes; I shall come and be present at the meeting. I don’t want my brother to forget himself.’

‘Jem!’

‘There, my dear Jack, it is of no use for you to be cross—I mean what I say. It will not do for you to get into one of your passions.’

‘My passions?’

‘Yes, your passions. It will cause trouble with Alleyne.’

‘A scoundrel!’

‘No, he is not a scoundrel, Jack. It will upset his little sister.’

‘A confounded jade!’ cried Sir John. ‘If I had known what I know now, the minx should never have entered my doors.’

‘Steady, Jack.’

‘I am steady, sir. A little heartless flirt, setting her cap at every man she sees. Rolph won’t own to it, but I have it on very good authority that the poor fellow could not stir without that vixen being on the watch for him, and meeting him somewhere.’

The major was silent.

‘And all the time she knew that he was engaged to Glynne, and she was professing to be the best of friends to the poor child.’

The major drew his breath very hard.

‘There, you’d better be off now, Jem,’ cried Sir John. ‘I’m going just to let that fellow Alleyne have a bit of my mind, and then I shall be better.’

‘But Mrs Alleyne is a most estimable lady. Had you not better give the matter up? Let it slide, my dear Jack. These troubles soon die a natural death.’

‘I’m going to kill this one, Jem. Then we’ll bury it,’ said Sir John grimly. ‘Now, you be off. I sha’n’t upset Mrs Alleyne. I won’t see her.’

‘Nor yet Lucy Alleyne?’

‘Not if she keeps out of my way. Ugh! I haven’t patience with the smooth-spoken little minx. It’s horrible: such depravity in one so young.’

The major sighed, and kept tightly hold of his brother’s arm. Two or three times over he had turned rather red in the face, the flush playing to and fro as if an angry storm were arising, but he mastered himself, and held his squadron of angry words well in hand.

‘Now, look here, Jem,’ said the baronet at last, as they came in sight of The Firs, ‘I don’t want to be hampered with you. Do go back.’

‘My dear Jack, as an old soldier, let me tell you that it is next to impossible to make an advance without being hampered with baggage and the commissariat. You may call me which you please, but if you are going to attack the people at The Firs, you must have me on your back, so take it as calmly as you can.’

Sir John uttered an angry grunt, and was disposed to explode, but, by a strong effort, he got over his fit.

‘If you will insist upon having a finger in the pie, come on then,’ he cried.

‘Yes, I’ll come on,’ said the major, ‘and I know I need say no more to you about being calm and gentlemanly. There, I won’t say another syllable.’

In fact neither spoke a word till they had climbed up the sandy path and reached the gate at The Firs,

where Sir John set the bell clanging loudly, and Eliza hurried down.

Yes; master was at home, and missus and Miss Lucy, the girl hastened to reply.

‘I want to see Mr Alleyne,’ said Sir John sharply, and Eliza showed them into the drawing-room, up and down whose faded carpet Sir John walked, fuming, while the major bent down over a few pretty little water-colour sketches, evidently the work of Lucy at some idle time.

Meanwhile Eliza had hurriedly made a communication to Mrs Alleyne, and terribly alarmed Lucy, who was for preventing Alleyne from meeting the brothers.

‘No,’ said Mrs Alleyne sternly, ‘he must see them. If he is to blame, let him frankly own it. If the fault be on their side, let them apologise to my son.’

The result was that at her earnest prayer Lucy was allowed to run into the observatory to her brother, to prepare him for the visitors.

‘Sir John — Major Day,’ said Alleyne, calmly. ‘I will come to them. No: let them be shown in here.’

Perhaps he felt that he would be stronger on his own ground, surrounded by his instruments, than in the chilly drawing-room, where he knew he was out of place.

‘But, Moray, dear, you will not be angry and passionate. You will not quarrel with Sir John.’

‘Angry?’ said Alleyne calmly. ‘I cannot tell. He might say things to me that will make me angry; but do not be afraid, I shall not quarrel.’

‘You promise me that, dear?’

‘I promise you.’

Lucy threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, and then ran out of the observatory, into which Sir John and the major were introduced a few minutes later.

Alleyne was right. He was stronger in his own place, for, surrounded as he was by the various strange implements used in his studies, he seemed to Sir John someone far more imposing than the simple dreamy man, whom he had come, as he called it, to put down.

Alleyne came from where he was standing with his hand resting upon some papers, and, bowing formally, he pointed to chairs, for it needed no words to tell that this was no friendly visit.

‘I’ve called, Mr. Alleyne,’ said Sir John, giving his stick a twist, and then a thump down upon the floor, ‘to ask for some explanation.’

The major laid a warning hand upon his arm, for Sir John’s voice was increasing in volume. In fact he had been impressed with the fact that his task was not so easy a one as he had imagined, and hence he was glad to have the sound of his own words to help work up the passion necessary to carry out his purpose.

He lowered his tone directly, though, in obedience to his brother's hint, and continued his discourse angrily, but still as a gentleman should ; and he afterwards owned to his brother that he forgot all about the horse-whipping he had designed from the moment he entered the room.

'Those telescopes and the quicksilver trough and instruments put it all out of mind, Jem,' he afterwards said. "One couldn't thrash a man who looks like a sage ; whose every word and tone seems to say that he is your superior.'

Sir John finished a sufficiently angry tirade, in which he pointed out that Alleyne had met with gentlemanly courtesy, that he had been treated with every confidence, and made the friend of the family. Miss Day had made a companion of his sister, and nothing had been wanting on his part ; while, on the other hand, Alleyne's conduct, Sir John said, had culminated in what was little better than an outrage.

'There, sir,' he exclaimed, by way of a finish, with his face very red and with a tremendous thump of his stick upon the floor. 'Now, what have you to say ?'

Alleyne stood before them deadly pale, and with a fine dew glistening upon his forehead ; but there was no look of shame or dread upon his face, which rather bore the aspect of one lately smitten by some severe mental blow from which he had not yet recovered.

He gazed straight before him without meeting the

eyes of either of his visitors, as if thinking of what reply he should find to a question that stung him to the heart. Then his eyes fell, and the wrinkles that formed in his brow made him look, at least, ten years older.

Just then, as Sir John was chafing, and without thoroughly owning to it, wishing that he had let matters rest, the major said softly,—

‘I thought I would come over with my brother, Mr Alleyne. I am sorry that this visit was deemed necessary.’

‘Hang it all, Jem, don’t take sides with the enemy! And you a soldier, too.’

‘I take no sides, John,’ replied the major, quietly. ‘Had we not better end this interview?’

‘I am waiting to hear what Mr Alleyne has to say to the father of the lady he insulted,’ cried the baronet warmly; and these words acted like a spur to Alleyne, who turned upon him proudly.

‘It was no insult, Sir John, to tell her that I loved her,’ he said.

‘But I say it was, sir, knowing as you did that she was engaged to Captain Rolph. Confound it all, sir, it was positively disgraceful. I am her father, sir, and I demand an apology—a full apology at once.’

Alleyne looked at him for a few moments in silence, and then, with his lips quivering, he spoke in a low deep voice,—

‘Tell her, Sir John, that in answer to your demand

I humbly ask forgiveness if I have given her pain. I regret my words most bitterly, and that I would they had been unsaid—that I ask her pardon.'

'That is enough, I think,' said Sir John, with a show of importance in his speech, but with a look in his eye that betokened more and more his dissatisfaction with his task.

'Quite,' said the major gravely. 'If an apology was necessary, Mr Alleyne has made the *amenae honorable*.'

'Exactly,' said Sir John impatiently, as if he were on the magisterial bench, and some poacher had been brought before him. 'And now, sir, what am I to say to Captain Rolph?'

The major laid his hand upon his brother's arm, but he could not check his words, and he turned round directly after, almost startled by the vehemence with which Alleyne spoke, with his keen eyes first upon one brother, then upon the other.

'Tell Captain Rolph, gentlemen, if he wishes for an apology to come and ask it of me himself.'

'Sir,' began Sir John; but the major quickly interposed.

'Mr Alleyne is quite right, John,' he said. 'He has apologised to the father of the lady he is accused of insulting; that ought to be sufficient. If Rolph feels aggrieved, it should be his duty to himself apply for redress.'

'But—' began Sir John.

‘That will do, my dear John,’ said the major firmly. ‘You have performed the duty you came to fulfil; now let us go. Mr Alleyne, for my part, I am very sorry this has happened—good day.’

Alleyne bowed, and Sir John, who was feeling beaten, allowed the major to lead him out of the house, the latter feeling quite relieved when they were in the lane, for he had been dreading the coming of Mrs Alleyne or Lucy for the last ten minutes of their visit.

‘Hah!’ he ejaculated, breathing more freely, ‘I am glad that is over.’

‘But it isn’t over,’ cried Sir John, who was exceedingly unsettled in his mind. ‘Why, Jem, your confounded interference has spoiled the whole affair.’

‘Nonsense, Jack, he apologised very handsomely; what more would you have?’

‘What more would I have! How am I to face Rob? What am I to say when he asks me what apology the fellow made?’

‘My dear Jack,’ said the major, ‘I may be wrong, but I look upon Mr Alleyne as a thorough gentleman.’

‘Oh, do you?’

‘Yes, my boy, I do; and it is very unseemly, to my way of thinking, for you to be speaking of him as “that fellow” or “the fellow.” If your chosen son-in-law were one half as much of a gentleman in his conduct I should feel a great deal more happy over this match.’

Sir John's face flushed of a deeper red, and it looked as if fierce words would ensue between the brothers; but as much ire as could dwell in Sir John's genial spirit had been used up in the encounter with Alleyne, and it required many hours for the reserve to be refilled.

Hence, then, he bore in silence several rather plain remarks uttered by his brother, and walked back to the park, where they encountered Rolph coming rapidly down the long drive.

'Seems in a hurry to hear our news,' said Sir John.

'Pshaw!' ejaculated the major; 'he has not seen us. He is training for something or another.'

'Nonsense, Jem. How spitefully you speak. He is coming to meet us, I tell you.'

Sir John's words did not carry conviction with them, for it was strange that if the captain were coming to meet them, he should be running in a very peculiar manner, with his fists clenched and his eyes bent upon the ground; and, in fact, as he reached something white, which proved to be a pocket handkerchief tied to a cane stuck in the ground, he turned suddenly, and ran off in the opposite direction.

'Humph!' grumbled Sir John; 'it does look as if he were having a run.'

'Very much,' said the major, 'five hundred yards run along the carriage drive. What is he training for now?'

'Tchah!' ejaculated Sir John; 'don't ask me. Here, hi! Rob! Hang the fellow: is he deaf?'

Rolph seemed to be. He ran, growing more distant every moment, while, as Sir John trudged on, he was evidently fretting and fuming, the more, too, that the major seemed to be in a malicious spirit, and to enjoy worrying him about his choice.

‘Poor fellow!’ he said; ‘he is overdone with impatience to hear the result of your visit, and can only keep down his excitement by running hard.’

‘Look here, Jem, if you want to quarrel, say so, and I’ll take another path to the house, for I’m not in the humour to have words.’

‘I am,’ said the major, ‘a good many. I feel as if there is nothing that would agree with me better than a deuced good quarrel with somebody.’

‘Then hang it, man, why didn’t you quarrel with Alleyne—take your niece’s part?’

‘Alleyne is not a man I could quarrel with,’ said the major sharply. ‘There, I’ll go and have a few words with Rolph about the cool way in which he takes a quarrel that you look upon as almost vital.’

‘No, no, for goodness sake don’t do anything of the kind,’ cried Sir John sharply, and he caught his brother by the shoulder. ‘My dear Jem, don’t be absurd.’

The major muttered something that was inaudible, and struck right across the park towards the house, by the lawn, while Sir John, feeling out of humour with his brother, with Rolph, and even with himself, went on along the carriage drive to encounter his

prospective son-in-law after a few minutes, perspiring and panting after running fifteen hundred yards towards a mile.

‘Hullo! back?’ panted Rolph.

‘Yes,’ said Sir John abruptly.

‘Well, what did he say?’

‘I’ll tell you after dinner,’ replied Sir John sourly; ‘your training must be too important to be left.’

‘What did he mean?’ said Rolph to himself as he stood watching Sir John’s retreating form. ‘Why, the old boy looks as if he had been huffed. Bah! I wish he wouldn’t come and stop me when I’m running; he has given me quite a chill.’

CHAPTER II.

THE STARS AT THE NADIR.

‘I WILL see him again, Mrs Alleyne, and try a little more persuasion ; perhaps he will yield.’

‘But are you sure you are right, Mr Oldroyd ? I know my son’s constitution so well. Would it be better to go to some specialist ?’

‘My dear madam, I would advise you directly to persuade him to go up to town and see any of our magnates, but it would be so much money wasted.’

‘But he seems so ill again !’ sighed Mrs Alleyne.

‘He does, indeed, but this illness is one of the simplest of ailments. It needs no doctor to tell you what it is. Really, Mrs Alleyne, if you will set maternal anxiety aside for one moment, and look at your son as you would at a stranger, you will see directly what is wrong. It is only an aggravated form of the complaint for which you consulted me before.’

‘If I could only feel so,’ sighed Mrs Alleyne.

‘Really, madam, you may,’ replied Oldroyd. ‘When you first called me in, you know what I prescribed, and how much better he grew. I pre-

scribe the same again. If we set Nature and her simple laws at defiance, she will punish us.'

'But he grows worse,' sighed Mrs Alleyne. 'He devotes himself more and more to his studies, and it is hard work to get him out of the observatory. He says he has some discovery on the way, and to make that he is turning himself into an old man. Will you go and see him now?'

Oldroyd bowed his acquiescence, and rose to go.

'You had better go alone,' said Mrs Alleyne, 'as if you had called in as a friend. He is very sensitive and strange at times, and I should not like him to think that I had sent for you.'

'It would be as well not,' said Oldroyd ; and, taking the familiar way, he was crossing the hall, when he came suddenly upon Lucy, who stopped short, turned very red, turned hastily, and hurried through the next door, which closed after her with quite a bang.

Oldroyd's brow filled with lines, and he drew a long breath as he went on to the door of the observatory, knocked, and, receiving no answer, turned the handle gently and stepped in, closing the door behind him.

He stood for a few minutes in what seemed to be intense darkness ; but as his eyes grew more accustomed to the great place, he could see that through the closed shutters a white stream of light came here and there, and on one side there was a very small, closely-shaded lamp, which threw a ring of softened

yellow light down upon a sheet of paper covered with figures. Saving these faint traces of light all was gloom and obscurity, through which loomed out in a weirdly, grotesque fashion the great tubes and pedestals and wheels of the various instruments that stood in the place. On one side, too, a bright ray of light shone from a spot near the floor, and, after a moment or two, Oldroyd recalled that there stood the large trough of mercury, glittering like a mirror, and now reflecting a ray of light as if it were a star.

The silence was perfect, not a breath could be heard, and it was some few minutes before Oldroyd made out that his friend was seated on the other side of the table that bore the shaded lamp, his head resting upon his hand, perfectly motionless, but whether asleep or thinking it was impossible to say.

Oldroyd had not seen the astronomer for some weeks. There had been no falling off from the friendly feeling existing between them, but Alleyne had completely secluded himself since the encounter with Rolph in the fir wood, and, for reasons of his own, Oldroyd had refrained from calling, the principal cause being, as he told himself, a desire not to encounter Lucy.

He stood waiting for a short time watching the dimly-seen figure, and half-expecting that it would move and speak ; but the minutes sped on, and the dead silence continued till Oldroyd, as he gave another look round the gloomy place, black as night

in the early part of the afternoon of a sunny day, could not help saying to himself—‘How can a man expect health when he shuts himself up in such a tomb?’

He crossed the place cautiously, and with outstretched hands, lest he should fall over a chair or philosophical instrument; but though he made some little noise, Alleyne did not stir, even when his visitor was close up to the table, looking down upon the head resting upon the dimly-seen hand.

‘He must be asleep, worn out with watching,’ thought Oldroyd; and he remained silent again for a few minutes, waiting for his friend to move. But Alleyne remained motionless; and now the visitor could see that his hair was rough and untended, and that he was in a loose kind of dressing-gown.

‘Alleyne! Alleyne!’ said Oldroyd at last, but there was no movement. ‘Alleyne!’ cried Oldroyd, louder now, but without result, and, feeling startled, he caught the shade from the lamp, so that the light might fall upon the heavily-bearded face.

As he did so, Alleyne moved, slowly raising his head, and letting his hand drop till he was gazing full at his visitor.

‘Were you asleep?’ said Oldroyd uneasily, ‘or are you ill?’

‘Asleep?—ill?’ replied Alleyne, in a low, dreamy voice, his eyes blinking uneasily in the light, as he displayed a white and ghastly face to his visitor, one

that was startling in its aspect. 'No, I am quite well. I was thinking.'

Oldroyd was not ignorant of his friend's trouble, but he was surprised and shocked at the change that had taken place in so short a time; and laying his hand upon Alleyne's shoulder, and closely scanning the deeply-lined, ashy face, he said quietly,—

'May I open a shutter or two, and admit the light?'

'Light?—shutter?' said Alleyne dreamily; 'is it morning?'

'Yes; glorious sunny morning, man. There, now we can see each other,' cried Oldroyd cheerfully, as he threw back one or two shutters. 'Why, Alleyne, how you do stick to the work.'

'Yes—yes,' in a low, dreamy voice. 'There is so much to do, and one gets on so slowly.'

'Big problem on, I suppose, as usual, eh?'

'Yes; a difficult problem,' said Alleyne vacantly. 'These things take time.'

'Ah, I suppose so,' replied Oldroyd. 'How's the garden getting on now?'

'Garden?—the garden! Oh, yes; I had forgotten. Very well, I think; but I have been too much occupied for the past few weeks—months—weeks to attend to it myself.'

'I suppose so. One has to work hard to do more than one's fellows, eh?'

Alleyne looked at him blankly.

‘Yes, one has to work hard,’ he replied.

‘I thought, perhaps, as you have been shut up so much lately, you would come and have a round with me,’ continued Oldroyd. ‘It is a splendid day.’

Alleyne looked at him dreamily, as if he felt that something of the brightness of the outer day had accompanied his friend into the room, but he merely shook his head.

‘Oh, nonsense, man!’ cried Oldroyd, speaking with energy. ‘You work too hard. I am sure you do.’

‘I am obliged,’ said Alleyne gravely. ‘It is the only rest I have.’

He seemed to be growing more animated already, and to be fully awakened to the presence of his friend, for his next words possessed more energy, when, in reply to a little more persuasion, he exclaimed,—

‘Don’t ask me, Oldroyd. I have, I tell you, too much to do.’

It seemed useless to press him further, and the doctor felt that it would be unwise, perhaps, to say more, so he took a seat and waited for Alleyne to speak again, apparently like any idler who might have called, but really observant of him all the time.

It was a curious study the manner in which these two men bore their trouble. Each was a student in a different field, and each had sought relief in his own particular subject, with the result that the one

had grown old and careworn and neglectful of self in a few weeks, while the other was only more grave and energetic than before.

It may have been that the love of one was deeper than that of the other, though that was doubtful. It rather seemed to be that while Alleyne was cut to the heart by the bitterness of the rebuff that he had met, a certain amount of resentment against one whom he looked upon as a light and trivial flirt had softened Oldroyd's blow.

But, to the latter's surprise, his friend and patient made no further remark. He sat gazing at vacancy for a few moments, and then allowed his head to rest once more upon his hand, as if about to go to sleep; but at the first movement made by Oldroyd he looked up again, and replaced the shade upon his lamp.

'Life is so short,' he said, with a grave smile; 'time goes so very fast, Oldroyd, I must get on. You will excuse me, I know.'

'Yes, I must be getting on as well. I shall call in upon you oftener than I have lately. You will perhaps come out with me again sometimes.'

'Out with you! To see your patient the poacher?'

'Oh, no,' replied Oldroyd, smiling. 'He is quite well again now. I have not been there these two months; but I can soon find an object for a walk.'

'A walk? Yes, perhaps. We shall see. Will you close the shutters when you go. I must have darkness for such work as this.'

‘Yes, I’ll close them,’ said Oldroyd quietly; and crossing the room he did what he had been requested before walking out of the observatory, leaving Alleyne absorbed once more in his thoughts, and too intent to raise his head as his visitor bade him good-day.

By accident or design, Oldroyd encountered Lucy once more in crossing the hall, bowing to her gravely, his salute being received with chilling courtesy by the young lady, who again hurried away, truth to tell, to ascend to her bedroom and cry over the unhappy way in which her life course was being turned.

‘Well,’ said Mrs Alleyne anxiously, as she advanced to meet Oldroyd, ‘what do you think?’

‘Exactly what I thought before I saw your son, madam. He is again setting Nature at defiance and suffering for the sin.’

‘And what is to be done?’

Oldroyd shook his head as he thought of the medicine that would have cured Alleyne’s complaint—a remedy that appeared to be unattainable, watched as it were by a military dragon of the name of Rolph, and all the young doctor could say for the anxious mother’s comfort was on leaving,—

‘We must wait.’

CHAPTER III.

A DISCOVERY.

‘LUCY, I have something very particular to say to you,’ said Mrs Alleyne one morning directly after breakfast, over which she had sat very stern and cold of mien.

‘Mamma!’ exclaimed Lucy, flushing.

‘I desire that you be perfectly frank with me. I insist upon knowing everything at once.’

Lucy’s pretty face fired up a deeper crimson for a few moments under this examination. Then she grew pale as she rose from her seat and stood confronting her mother.

‘I do not think I quite understand you, mamma,’ she faltered.

‘Lucy!’

The thrill of maternal indignation made the old brown silk dress once more give forth a slight electric kind of rustle as this one word was spoken, and Mrs Alleyne’s eyes seemed to lance her child.

‘A guilty conscience, Lucy, needs no accuser,’ said Mrs Alleyne, in a bitterly contemptuous tone. ‘You know perfectly well what I mean.’

Lucy glanced half-timidly, half-wonderingly at her mother, but remained silent.

‘I will not refuse you my permission to go your daily walks in future, but I must ask you to give me your word that such proceedings as have been reported to me of late shall be at an end.’

Lucy opened her lips to speak, but Mrs Alleyne held up her hand.

‘If you are going to say that you do not know what I mean, pray hesitate. I refer to your meetings with Captain Rolph.’

Lucy’s shame and dismay had been swept away by a feeling of resentment now, and, giving her little foot a pettish stamp, she exclaimed,—

‘The country side is free to Captain Rolph as well as to me, mamma. I know him from meeting him at the hall. I cannot help it if he speaks to me when I am out.’

‘But you can help making appointments with him,’ retorted Mrs Alleyne.

‘I never did, mamma. I declare I never did,’ cried Lucy with spirit.

‘But you go in places where he is likely to be seen ; and even if he were an eligible suitor for your hand, is this the way a child of mine should behave ? Giving open countenance to the wretched tittle-tattle of this out-of-the-way place.’

‘And pray, who has been talking about me ?’ cried Lucy angrily.

‘The poor people at the cottages—the servants. It is commonly known. I spoke to Mr Oldroyd yesterday.’

‘And what did he dare to say?’ cried Lucy, flaming up.

‘He would not say anything, but from his manner it was plain to see that he knew.’

‘Oh!’ sighed Lucy, with an expiration that betokened intense relief.

‘I have not yet spoken to Moray, but I feel that it is my duty to tell him all, and to bid him call Captain Rolph to account for what looks to me like a very ungentlemanly pursuit, and one that you must have encouraged.’

Lucy wanted to exclaim that she had not encouraged him; but here her conscience interposed, and she remained silent, while Mrs Alleyne went on in her cold, austere manner.

‘Far be it from me,’ she said, ‘to wish to check any natural impulses of your young life. It might cause a feeling akin to jealousy, but I should not murmur, Lucy, at your forming some attachment. I should even rejoice if Moray were to love and marry some sweet girl. It would work a change in him and drive away the strange morbid fancies which he shows at times. But clandestine proceedings with such an offensive, repellent person as that Captain Rolph I cannot countenance. I’m sure when Moray knows—’

‘But Moray must not know, mamma.’

‘And pray why not, Lucy?’

‘Has he not been ill and troubled enough without being made anxious about such a piece of nonsense as this?’

‘But I am hearing of it from all sides; and, see here.’

Mrs Alleyne handed a letter to her daughter, and Lucy turned it over in her trembling fingers while she stood flushed and indignant before her mother.

‘All I can say is,’ said Mrs Alleyne, ‘that if you have carried on this wretched flirtation with the betrothed of the girl you called your friend, it is most disgraceful.’

‘I tell you again, mamma, it is not true,’ cried Lucy passionately. ‘Oh, why will you not believe me!’

‘Read that letter,’ said Mrs Alleyne sternly.

Lucy’s eyes fell upon the paper, and then she snatched them away, but only to look at it again and read the stereotyped form of anonymous letter from a true friend, asking whether Mrs Alleyne was aware that her daughter was in the habit of meeting Captain Rolph at night, etc., etc., etc.

‘How can anyone write such a scandalous untruth!’ cried Lucy passionately; ‘and it is cruel—cruel in the extreme of you, mamma, to think for a moment that it is true.’

‘That what is true?’ said a deep, grave voice.

Mother and daughter turned quickly to see that Alleyne had come in during their altercation, and he now stretched out his hand for the letter.

Lucy looked up in the white, stern face, almost with a fright, and then shrinkingly, as if he were her judge, placed the letter in his hands, and shrank back to watch his countenance, as he read it slowly through, weighing every word before turning to Mrs Alleyne.

‘Did you receive this?’ he said.

‘Yes, Moray; but I did not mean to let it trouble you, my son.’

‘Leave Lucy with me for a few minutes, mother,’ said Alleyne sternly.

‘But, Moray, my son—’

‘I wish it, mother,’ he said coldly; and, taking her hand, he was about to lead her to the door, but he altered his mind, and, with old-fashioned courtesy, took her to her chair, after which he deliberately tore up the letter and burned the scraps before turning to his sister.

‘Come with me, Lucy,’ he said in his deep, grave tones. ‘I wish to speak with you.’

He held the door open, and Lucy passed out before him, trembling and agitated, as if she were going to her trial, while Alleyne quietly closed each door after them, and followed her into the observatory, where he sat down and held out his hand, looking up at the poor girl with so tender and pitying an aspect that she uttered a sobbing cry, caught his hands in hers,

and, throwing herself on her knees at his feet, burst into a passion of weeping.

‘Poor little woman,’ he said tenderly, as he drew her more and more to him, till her head rested upon his breast, and with one hand he gently stroked the glossy hair. ‘Come, Lucy, I am not your judge, only your brother : tell me—is that true?’

‘No—no—no—no ! Moray, it is false as false can be. I have not seen or spoken to Captain Rolph for months.’

‘But you did see and speak to him alone, little woman?’ he said, looking paler and older and as if every word was a trouble to him to utter.

‘Yes, dear, I did, for—for— Oh, Moray, I will—I will speak,’ she sobbed, in a passionate burst of tears. ‘You are so big and kind and good, I will tell you everything.’

‘Tell me, then,’ he said, patting her head, as if she were his child. ‘You did love this man?’

‘Moray !’

Only that word ; but it was so full of scorn, contempt, and reproach also to the questioner, that it carried conviction with it, and, taking Lucy’s face between his hands, Alleyne bent down and kissed her tenderly.

‘I am very glad, dear,’ he said quietly, ‘more glad than I dare say to you ; but tell me—you used to meet him frequently?’

‘Yes, yes, Moray, I did—I did, dear. It was

wicked and false of me. I ought not to have done what I did, but—but—oh, Moray—will you forgive me if I tell you all?’

He remained silent for a few moments, gazing sternly down into his sister's eyes, and then said softly,—

‘Yes, Lucy, I will forgive you anything that you have done.’

‘I—I—thought it was for the best,’ she sobbed—
‘I thought I should be serving you, Moray, dear.’

‘How? serving me?’

‘Yes, yes, I knew—I felt all that you felt, and seemed to read all your thoughts, and I wanted—I wanted—oh, Moray, dear, forgive me for causing you pain in what I say, I wanted Glynne to love you as I saw that you loved her.’

His brow knit tightly, and he drew a long and gasping breath, but he controlled himself, and in a low, almost inaudible voice, he whispered,—

‘Go on.’

‘I was out walking one morning,’ continued Lucy, ‘and Captain Rolph met me, and—a woman sees anything so quickly—he began paying me compliments, and flirting, and he seemed so false and careless of Glynne that I thought there would be no harm in encouraging him a little, and letting him think I was impressed, so that Glynne might find out how worthless and common he is, and then send him about his business, Moray, dear. And then when her eyes were

opened, she might—might— Oh, Moray, dear, I don't like to say it. But I went on like that, and he used to see me whenever I was out. He watched for me, and he doesn't care a bit for Glynne, and I don't believe he did for me; I never even let him touch my hand, and it's all months ago now, and oh, Moray, Moray, I'm a wicked, wicked girl, and everybody thinks ill of me, even mamma, and I've never been happy since.'

'And so you did all this, little woman, for me?'

'Yes, yes, dear, I—I thought I was doing right.'

'And I thought that you cared for Oldroyd, Lucy, and—'

'No, no: I hate him,' she cried passionately, and her cheeks turned scarlet for the sinful little words.

'And you are very unhappy, my child?' he continued.

'Yes, yes, yes, miserably unhappy, dear. I wish we were thousands of miles away, and all dead and buried, and never—and never likely to see this horrid place again.'

'And I have been so rapt in my studies—in myself,' he said, colouring slightly, as if ashamed to accept the screen of the slightest subterfuge. 'I have neglected you, little Lucy,' he went on, tenderly caressing her. 'And this wretched anonymous letter, evidently from some spiteful woman, is all false, dear?'

'Every word, Moray. I have not spoken to

Captain Rolph since that day he came here, and—'

'Hush! hush!' said Alleyne softly; and his face grew very thin and old. 'Think no more about the letter. Wipe your eyes, my child. I'm glad—very glad you do not care for this man.'

'I care for that animal!' cried Lucy scornfully. 'Oh, Moray, how could you think it of me?'

'Because—'

The words were on Moray Alleyne's lips to say, 'Women are such strange creatures!' but he checked himself, and said softly,—'Let it pass, my child. There, there, wipe those poor, wet, red eyes. I'll go and speak to our mother. This vexed her, for she thought you had been a little weak and foolish. She is jealous, dear, and proud and watchful of our every act. It is her great love for us. There, there, kiss me; and go to your room for a while. Everything will be well when you come down again.'

'Will it, Moray?' whispered Lucy, nestling more closely to him. 'Is my brave, strong, noble brother going to be himself once more?'

She held herself from him so that she might gaze full in his face, but he kept his eyes averted.

'Moray, I am so little and weak,' she whispered, 'but I have my pride. You must not let a disappointment eat out all the pleasure of your life.'

'Hush!' he said softly.

'I will speak,' she cried. 'Moray, my own brother,

you must not break your great true heart because a handsome woman has played with you for a time, and then thrown you aside for a worthless, foolish man.'

He fixed his eyes upon her now, and said sadly, as he smiled in her face,—

'Wrong, little sister, wrong. I was mad, and forgot myself. She was promised to another before we had met.'

'Yes, Moray, dear, but—'

'Silence! No more,' he said sternly. 'Never refer to this again.'

'Oh, but, Moray, darling, let me—'

'Hush!' he said, laying his finger tenderly, half-playfully, upon her lip, and then removing it to kiss her affectionately. 'All that is dead and gone, Lucy. We must not dig up the dry bones of our old sorrows to revive them once again. I have long been promised to a mistress whom I forsook for a time—to whom I was unfaithful. She has forgiven me, dear, and taken me back to her arms. Urania is my heart's love,' he continued, smiling, 'and I am going to be a faithful spouse. There, there, little sister, go now, and I will make your peace with our mother, or rather ask her to make her peace with you.'

He led her to the door and dismissed her with another kiss, after which he stood watching her ascend the stairs, and saw her stop on the landing to kiss her hand to him. Then he sought his mother,

with whom he had a serious interview, leaving her at the end of an hour to return to his chair in the observatory, when he took up a pen, as if to write, but only let it fall; and, forgetful of everything but his own sorrow, sat there dreaming, old-looking and strange till the sun went down.

He used to tell himself afterwards that on such nights as these he was tempted by his own peculiar devil who haunted him, pointing out to him his folly, weakness and pride in shutting himself up there, when he had but to go to Glynne and tell her that she was selling herself to a man who was behaving to her like a scoundrel.

If he treated her like this before marriage, when his feelings towards her should be of the warmest and best, when he was in the spring-tide of his youth, what would his conduct be afterwards, when he had grown tired and careless?

He could not help it. That night Alleyne made his way to the fir mount once more, to go to the very edge and stand beneath the natural east window of the great wind-swept temple, and there lean against one of the ruddy bronze pillars to gaze across at The Hall.

But not to gaze at the lights, for there was one dark spot which he well knew now from Lucy's description. It was where the little wistaria-covered conservatory stood out beside her bedroom window, with the great cable-like stems running up to form

a natural rope ladder by which a lover might steal up in the darkness of some soft summer night, as lovers had ere now, but only when willing arms waited them and a soft sweet cooing voice had whispered 'Come.'

It was as if a voice whispered this to him night after night, and it came to him mockingly as he stood there then.

There was yet time it seemed to say. Glynne would turn to him if she knew of those scenes in the lane, and his rival would be discomfited. Sir John, too, would hail him as a friend and benefactor, receiving him with open arms for saving his daughter from such a fate.

And then Alleyne paced the great dark aisle, avoiding, as if by instinct, the various trunks that stood in his way, while he forced his spirit into a state of calmness and the temptation behind him, for such an act was to him impossible. It had all been a mad dream on his part, and it was not for him to play the part of informer and expose Rolph's falsity to the father of the woman he was to wed.

CHAPTER IV.

STILL IN THE CLOUDS.

THERE was no mistaking the figures, no possibility of erring in judgment upon the meaning of the meeting? and Oldroyd could not help admiring the physical beauty of the group as the lovely background of hedgerow and woodland gave effect to the scene.

The group was composed of two. The poacher's daughter and Rolph, who, with his arms tightly clasping the girl's tall undulating form, had drawn her, apparently by no means unwillingly to his breast, against which she nestled with her hands resting upon his shoulders. The girl's face was half hidden, while Rolph was smiling down upon her, whispering something to which she lent a willing ear, and then, raising her face, she was offering her pouting lips to his, when her half-closed eyes suddenly became widely opened, her whole form rigid, and, thrusting Rolph back, she slipped from his arms, bounded through a gap in the woodland hedge like some wild creature, and disappeared amongst the trees.

Rolph caught sight of the on-coming figure almost at the same moment, the spasmodic start given by

Judith warning him that there was something wrong. He seemed for a moment as if about to yield to the more easy way out of his difficulty, and leap into the wood, but he stood his ground, and, as Oldroyd came slowly on, said to him,—

‘How do, doctor? Perhaps you’ve got a light? I want one for my cigar. Thanks.’

His coolness was staggering.

‘Is it a fact about that girl’s father being still at home and out of work?’

‘Yes,’ replied Oldroyd shortly. ‘He has been at the point of death.’

‘Has he, though?’ said Rolph. ‘I’m glad of that. One don’t like to be imposed upon, and to find that when one has given money in charity that it has been a regular do. Nice day. Good-morning.’

‘Knows I can’t tell tales, d—n him! I’m no spy,’ muttered Oldroyd, as he ambled along on the miller’s pony. ‘I’ve got quite enough to do to study my own profession, and to try and cure my patients without worrying myself in the slightest degree about other people’s business, but I can’t help it if they will be holding clandestine meetings just under my noble Roman nose— Go on, Peter.’

Peter lifted his head and whisked his tail; then he lowered his head, and kept his end quiescent, as he went on at the old pace, while the young doctor continued musing about the interview that he had been called upon to witness.

‘I should not have been out here if old Mother Wattley had not been taken ill once more, for the last time, poor old soul. I believe she’ll live to a hundred. I was obliged to come, though. I don’t suppose anybody passes along this lane above once a month. I’m the only one who has come down this week, and of course I must be there just when the athlete was having an interview with Judith Hayle. Humph! there are other poachers in the world besides those who go after rabbits, hares and pheasants.’

Oldroyd drummed the sides of his little charger as he rode on along a very narrow pathway through the wood that he had to cross to get to old Mrs Wattley’s, and he looked anything but a picturesque object as a cavalier, for either he was too big or his steed too small—the latter, a little shaggy, rarely-groomed creature, being more accustomed to drag loads of corn for his master from the town than to act as hack for the principal medical man of the neighbourhood.

Peter pricked up his ears as soon as they were through the wood, and turned off, unguided, to the right, where, on as lonely and deserted a spot as could have been selected, being built in fact upon a pare corner between the road and the next property, stood the cottage inhabited by old Mrs Wattley. Report said that Timothy Wattley had built himself a shed there many years before, this being a sort of common land. The shed had been contrived by the

insertion of four fir-poles at the angles, some others being tied across to form a roof, while sides and top were of freshly cut furze.

Time went on, and the windy side of Tim Wattley's shed was coated with mud. More time went by, and a thatched roof appeared. Then came a real brick chimney and a proper door, and so on, and so on, till, in the course of years, the shed grew into quite a respectable cottage, with separate rooms—two—and a real iron fireplace.

Then report said that instead of walking over to church on Sunday mornings, Timothy Wattley used to send his wife, while he idled round his little scrap of a garden, pushing the hedge out a bit more and a bit more with his heavy boot, and all so gradually that the process was unnoticed, while when the old man died after forty years' possession of the place, the patch upon which he had first set up his fir-pole and furze shed had grown into a freehold of an acre and a half, properly hedged in, and of which the widow could not be dispossessed.

It was at the rough little gate of the cottage that Peter the pony stopped short, and began nibbling the most tender shoots of the hedge that he could find. Oldroyd dismounted and secured the reins before going up to the door; tapping, and then going straight in, lowering his head to avoid a blow from the cross-piece that might have been fixed by a dwarf.

‘ Ah, doctor,’ came from the large bed which nearly filled up the little room, and on which lay the comfortable - looking, puckered, apple - faced old woman, ‘ you’ve been a long time coming. If I had been some rich folks up at Brackley or somers-else, you’d have been here long enough ago.’

‘ My dear Mrs Wattley,’ cried Oldroyd ; ‘ nothing of the kind. I took the pony and rode over as soon as I had your message, and I could not have done more if you had been the queen.’

‘ Then it’s that dratted boy went and forgot it yesterday morning. Oh, if ever I grow well and strong again, I’ll let him know !’

‘ Did you send a message yesterday morning, then ?’

‘ Ay, did I, when that young dog was going over to the town ; and he forgot it, then.’

‘ I only had the message, as I tell you, to-day.’

‘ An’ me lying in tarmint all yes’d day, and all night listening to the poachers out with their guns. Eh, but it’s sorry work wi’ them and the keepers, and not one on ’em man enough to leave a hare or a fezzan with a poor old woman who’s hidden away many a lot of game for them in her time. Eh, but it’s hard work, lying in my aggynies the long night through, and my neighbour coming to set up with me and nuss me, and going off to sleep, and snoring like a bad-ringed hog.’

‘ Ah, then your neighbour sat up with you last night, did she ?’ said Oldroyd.

‘Sat up with me? Snored up with me, and nearly drove me wild, my aggynies was that bad. Then she goes and sends Judy to tidy me up after braxfas, and a nice tidying up it was, with her all agog to get away and meet someone I’ll be bound. I dunno who it be, but she’s allus courting somers in the wood. Ah, I went courting once, but now it’s all aggynies.’

‘And so you’re in great pain, are you, Mrs Wattley?’

‘Aggynies I tellee, aggynies.’

‘Ah, it’s rheumatism, old lady, rheumatism.’

‘There man, as if I didn’t know that. Think I’ve had these aggynies a-coming on at every change of the wind, and not know as it’s rheumatiz, why, as I says to Miss Lucy Alling, there, as comes over from the big house a’side the common yonder, and brought me a few bits o’ chicking, and sits herself down in that very chair, “I’ve had ’em too many years now, my dear, not to know as they’re rheumatiz. I’ll ask Doctor Oldroyd,” I says, “to give me some of they old iles as used to be got when I was younger than I am.” Fine things they was for the rheumatiz, but they don’t seem to be able to get ’em now.’

Oldroyd moved uneasily in his seat, as he learned how lately Lucy had been there, and that she had occupied the very chair he was in. Then he hastily proceeded to cross-examine the poor old woman about her troubles, every answer he received going to prove that, for an old lady over ninety, Mrs Wattley was

about as well preserved and healthy a specimen of humanity as it would be possible to find.

‘Ah, well,’ said Oldroyd at last, ‘I daresay I shall be able to give you a little comfort. You’ll have to take some medicine, though.’

‘Nay, nay, I want the iles, and I want ’em rubbed in,’ cried the old lady. ‘Nothing ever did me so much good as they iles; and I know what it all means—waiting three or four days afore I gets the medson to take.’

‘Now, what is this,’ said Oldroyd, smiling; ‘I have brought it with me’

As he spoke he took a bottle from the breast of his coat.

‘Then it’s pyson, and you’re going to give it to get rid of me, just a cause you parish doctors won’t take the trouble to attend poor people. I know; you want to get rid of me, you do.’

‘How can you talk like that? Have I ever neglected you?’

‘Well, p’r’aps not so much as him as was here afore you did. He neglecket me shameful. But you’ve got tired of me, and you want to see me put under ground.’

‘What makes you say that?’ said Oldroyd, laughing.

‘’Cause you want me to take that physic as isn’t proper for me.’

‘Why you comical, prejudiced old woman,’ he said, ‘it is the best thing I can give you.’

‘Oh, no, it isn’t. I know better,’ cried the old lady. ‘Don’t tell me. I may be ninety, but I a’n’t lived to ninety without knowing as one physic a’n’t good for everything.’

‘Oh, that’s it, is it?’ cried Oldroyd, laughing. ‘You think I haven’t got the right stuff for you.’

‘Ah, it’s nothing to laugh at, young man. I’m not a fool. How could you know what was the matter with me before you come, and so bring the stuff? I a’n’t a cow, as only wants one kind of physic all its life.’

‘Nay, I did know what was the matter with you,’ cried Oldroyd, taking the poor, prejudiced old things hand, to speak kindly and seriously though with a little politic flattery. ‘The boy came to me and said you were ill, and I immediately, knowing you as I do, said to myself—now with such a constitution as Mrs Wattley has, there can only be one of two things the matter with her; someone has carelessly left a door or window open, and given her cold; or else she has got a touch of rheumatism.’

‘And so you brought physic for a cold,’ said the old woman sharply.

‘No. I knew you would be too careful to let anyone neglect your doors and windows.’

‘That I would,’ cried the old lady. ‘I fetched that Judy back with a flea in her ear only the day afore yesterday. I shouted till she came back and shut my

door after her—a slut. She thinks of nothing but young men.'

'You see I was right,' continued Oldroyd. 'I felt sure it was not cold, and, on looking out, saw that the wind had got round to the east, so I mixed up his prescription, the best thing there is for rheumatism, and came on at once.'

'Is it as good as the iles, young man?'

'Far better; and I'm sure you will find relief.'

'Well, you are right about the wind, for I felt it in my bones as soon as it got round; so, p'r'aps you're right about the physic. I dunno, though, you're only a boy, and not likely to know much. It's a pity they send such young fellows as you to take charge of a parish. But the guardians don't care a bit. They'd like to see all the old uns go under, the sooner the better. Not as I'm beholden to 'em for aught but a drop o' physic. I can do without 'em, I daresay, for a good many years yet.'

'To be sure you can,' said Oldroyd, smiling rather gravely, as he looked at the ancient face before him.

'Ay, I can do without 'em; and now, look here, young man, you set me right again. I've got four shillings put aside, and I'll give you that.'

'I daresay I can set you right again without the four shillings,' said Oldroyd, 'but not if you begin by calling me a boy.'

'There's naught to be ashamed of in being a boy,'

cried the old woman sharply. 'I wish I was a gal now, and could begin all over again.'

'No, there's nothing to be ashamed of, old lady, but you must trust me, and take my medicine.'

'I won't—I won't swallow a drop, if you don't take your oath it's quite right, and will do me good, and won't pyson me.'

For answer Oldroyd rose from his seat, and took a cup from a shelf, into which he poured a portion of the medicine.

'There, it's no use, young man, I won't take a dose.'

'Look here,' cried Oldroyd ; and putting the cup to his lips, he swallowed all that was at the bottom.

'You're going to spit it out again as soon as you get outside.'

'Nonsense !' cried Oldroyd, laughing heartily as he poured out a fresh portion. 'There, there, take it, and get well again.'

'You're sure it's right, and that it won't hurt me?'

'I'm sure it will comfort you, and correct what is wrong.'

She watched him with her bright old eyes full of suspicion, and ended by taking the cup very doubtfully and swallowing its contents with a childlike shudder.

'There, give me a bit of sugar out of that basin, young man,' she cried emphatically ; and, upon her desire being gratified, she settled herself down again in bed with a satisfied sigh.

‘Ah, I feel better now,’ she said. ‘I suppose you are not quite so young as you look, are you?’

‘Really, Mrs Wattley, I don’t know,’ replied Oldroyd, smiling.

‘Perhaps you ar’n’t,’ she continued looking at him critically. ‘I daresay you’re clever enough, or else you wouldn’t be here; but we ladies don’t like to have a single man to see us when we are ill. You ought to be married, you know.’

‘Do you think so?’ said Oldroyd, looking rather conscious, as he thought of his prospects, matrimonially and financially.

‘Yes, I do think so,’ said the old lady tartly, and in a very dictatorial manner. ‘Look here, young man, there’s little Miss Lucy, who comes to see me now and then. Marry her, and if you behave yourself, perhaps I’ll leave you my cottage and ground. I sha’n’t leave ’em to Judy, for she don’t deserve ’em a bit.’

‘Leave them to your relatives, old lady; and suppose we turn back to the rheumatism,’ said Oldroyd, half-amused and half-annoyed by his patient’s remarks.

‘Ay, we’ll talk about that by-and-by. I want to talk about you. My rheumatics is better a’ready—that’s done me a mint o’ good, young man, and I shouldn’t mind seeing you married, for it would be a deal better for you, and I daresay I should call you in a bit more oftener. What, are you going?’

‘Yes ; I have the pony waiting, and I must get back.’

‘Humph ! I didn’t know as you could afford to keep a pony, young man. Why don’t you walk ?—keep you better and stronger—and save your money. Ah, well ! you may go then ; and mind what I said to you. You may as well have the bit of land and Miss Lucy, but you won’t get it yet, so don’t think it. My father was a hundred and two when he died, and I’m only just past ninety, so don’t expect too much.’

‘I will not,’ said Oldroyd, smiling at the helpless old creature, and thinking how contentedly she bore her fate of living quite alone by the roadside, and with the nearest cottage far away.

‘You’ll come and see me to-morrow ?’ said the old lady, as the doctor stood at the door. ‘You’re not so busy that you can’t spare time, so don’t you try to tell me that.’

‘No, I shall not be too busy,’ replied Oldroyd ; ‘I’ll come.’

‘And mind you recollect about her. She would just suit you ; she nusses so nicely, and—’

Philip Oldroyd did not hear the end of the speech, for he closed the door, frowning with annoyance ; and, mounting his pony, rode slowly back towards home.

‘I shall not meet them again, I suppose,’ he said to himself, as he neared the spot where he had seen Rolph and Judith on his way to the cottage ; and, quite satisfied upon this point, he was riding softly

on along the turf by the side of the road when, as he turned a corner, he came suddenly upon two men—the one ruddy and sun-browned, the other pale, close shaven, and sunken of eye.

‘Hayle and Captain Rolph,’ said the doctor between his teeth, ‘what does that mean?’

He rode on to pass close by the pair, both of whom looked up, the one to give him a haughty nod of the head, the other to touch his hat and say,—‘How do, doctor?’

‘The parson is said to know most about the affairs of people in a parish,’ thought Oldroyd; ‘but that will not do. It’s a mistake. We are the knowing ones. Why, I could give quite a history of what is going on around us—if I liked. Your parson kens, as the north-country folk say, a’ about their morals, but we doctors are well up in the mental and bodily state too. Now then, who next? Bound to say, if I take the short cut through the firs and along the grass drives, I shall meet the old major toadstool hunting, and possibly Miss Day with him.’

Oldroyd’s ideas ran upon someone else; but he put the thoughts aside, and went on very moodily for a few minutes before his thoughts reverted to their former channel.

‘Safe to meet them,’ he muttered, with a bitter laugh. ‘Well, the captain is otherwise engaged to-day. The young lady with the gentleman as I came, and papa and the gentleman as I return. Well—go on

Peter—I have enough to do with my own professional affairs, and giving advice gratis on moral matters is not in my department. No mention of them in the pharmacopœia.’

Peter responded to his rider’s adjuration to go on in his customary way—to wit, he raised his head and whisked his tail, and went on, but without the slightest increase of speed. Oldroyd turned him out of the lane, through one of the game preserves, and he rode thoughtfully on for a couple of miles, with the peculiar smell of the bracken pervading the air as Peter crushed the stems beneath his hoofs. At times, as he rode through some opening where the sun beat down heavily, there was the pungent, lemony, resinous odour of the pines wafted to his nostrils, and once it was so strong that the doctor pulled up to inhale it.

‘What a lunatic I was,’ he thought, ‘to come and settle down in a place like this. Nature wants no doctors here; she does all the work herself—except the accidents,’ he added laughingly. ‘Poor old Hayle yonder; I don’t think she would have made so good a job of him.’

He rode on again through the hot afternoon sunshine, going more and more out of his way; but he did not see the major with his creel, neither did the lady attendant upon some of his walks make his sore heart begin beating.

He had just come to the conclusion that he had

ridden all this way round for nothing, when, as he wound round a mossy carpeted drive, he saw in the distance, framed in with green against a background of sky, a couple of figures, of which one, a lady, was holding out something to the other, a gipsy-looking fellow, which he took and thrust into his pocket, becoming conscious at the same moment of the doctor's approach.

'Looks like my young poaching friend, Caleb Kent,' thought Oldroyd, as the man touched his cap obsequiously and plunged at once in through the thick undergrowth and was gone, while the lady drew herself up and came toward him.

Oldroyd's acquaintanceship was of the most distant kind, and he merely raised his hat as he passed, noting that the face, which looked haughtily in his, was flushed and hot as his bow was returned.

'Why, that young scoundrel has been begging. Met her alone out here in this wood, thought Oldroyd, when he had ridden on for a few yards; and, on the impulse of the moment, he dragged the unwilling pony's head round, and, to the little animal's astonishment, struck his heels into its ribs and forced it to canter after the lady they had passed.

She did not hear the approach for a few minutes, but was walking on hurriedly with her head bent down, till, the soft beat of the pony's hoofs close

behind rousing her, she turned suddenly a wild and startled face.

‘I beg your pardon—Miss Emlin of The Warren, I believe?’ said Oldroyd, raising his hat again.

There was a distant bow.

‘You will excuse my interference,’ he continued; ‘but these woods are lonely, and I could not help seeing that man had accosted you.’

Marjorie’s face was like wax now in its pallor.

‘I thought so,’ said Oldroyd to himself. Then aloud,—‘He was begging, and frightened you?’

‘The man asked me for money, and I gave him some. No; he did not frighten me.’

A flush now came in the girl’s face, and she said eagerly,—

‘Did you pass a gentleman—my cousin, Captain Rolph—in the woods?’

‘Yes; about a couple of miles away. I beg pardon for my interference,’ there was an exchange of bows; and each passed on.

‘What a fool I am!’ muttered Oldroyd. ‘Like a man. Jumps at the chance of playing the knight-errant. Only begged a copper or two of her; a loafing scoundrel. Phew!’ he whistled, ‘my cousin! I’m afraid that my cousin is going to be pulled up sharp; and quite right too. Looks like a piece of jealousy there. And the fellow’s engaged. Well, it’s not my business. Go on, Peter, old man.’

Peter wagged his tail, but still there was no increase

of speed ; for, if ponies can think, Peter was cogitating on the fact that if he made haste home there would be time for him to go with Sinkins, the carpenter, to fetch a piece of oak from the wood ; and he felt that he had done enough for one day.

CHAPTER V.

PERTURBATIONS.

HAD Oldroyd been a little sooner, he would have formed a different opinion about Caleb Kent and his appealing to Marjorie for alms.

For that day, Marjorie had come down dressed for a walk—a saunter, to find a few botanical specimens, she told Mrs Rolph, who smiled and was quite content, so long as her niece settled down and made no trouble of the loss of her lover.

Marjorie did saunter as long as she was in sight, and then went off through the fir-woods rapidly, her eyes losing their soft, spaniel-like, far-away look which she so often turned upon Rolph, and growing fiercer and determined as she stepped out, full of the object she had in view.

For she had good reason to believe that Rolph had gone in the direction she was taking, and the desire was strong within her to come upon him suddenly, and at a time when she felt she would succeed in getting the whip-hand of him, and holding him at her mercy.

She had been walking nearly an hour fairly fast ; but now, as if guided by instinct, she turned into a green, mossy path, one of the many cut among the stubbs for the sportsmen's benefit, whether hunting or shooting their purpose was the same, and advancing now more cautiously she was looking sharply from side to side when the hazels were suddenly parted, and, with his white teeth glistening in the sunshine, and his dark eyes flashing, there stood Caleb Kent not two yards away ; then not one, as he caught her wrist in his hot, brown hands, and, with a laugh, placed his face close to hers.

'You've been a long time coming,' he said, 'but you promised, and I've come.'

For a few moments Marjorie stood gazing wildly at the man before her, with her brain reeling, and a strange sickening sensation attacking her, which rendered her speechless. Her lips moved, but no sound came, while the words which had passed between them thundered in her ears like the echoes of all that had been said.

Then a re-action took place, and, drawing herself up, she said quietly,—

'Well, what do you want—money?'

'No ; I can get money for myself,' he said, with a laugh. 'I've come back to you.'

She shrank from him now with a look of disgust, and shivered as she thought of the past, but recovering herself she turned upon him.

‘How dare you!’ she cried, with a look intended to keep him at bay.

Caleb laughed.

‘Well, you are a strange girl,’ he said; ‘hot one day, cold the next. But I don’t care; say what you like, dear.’

Marjorie started as if she had been stung at this last word, for, more than anything which had passed, it made her feel how she had fallen.

‘You want to play with me and hold me off; and you are going to say you didn’t mean it.’

With an action quick as that of some wild creature, he caught her wrist again, and looked at her mockingly, but with a flashing in his eyes which made her shiver and glance quickly round.

‘No,’ he said, with a laugh; ‘no one can see. But, look here,’ he whispered earnestly, ‘I’ve been thinking about you ever since. You don’t care for them here, and their money and fine clothes. Come away along with me—it’ll be free like—right away from everyone who knows you, and I’ll be real good to you, dear, ’pon my soul I will.’

‘Loose my wrist! How dare you!’ cried Marjorie; and in her alarm she wondered now that she could have been so mad with one whom she thought she could sway with a look, but who was beginning to sway her.

‘How dare I? because you like me to hold you,’ he whispered. ‘Do you think I’m a fool? Look here;

you used to love him, but you hate him now, and you love me. Well, I used to love Hayle's girl; I was mad after her, but since I've seen you I don't care a straw for her, not even if I never see her again.'

'Will you loose my wrist?' cried Marjorie, in a low, angry voice.

'No—not till I like.'

'Am I to call for assistance and have you punished, sir?'

'If you like,' he said mockingly. 'There, that will do. What's the good of all this nonsense? Don't play with me. I say you're a lady—a beautiful lady—and I never saw a woman I liked half so well. Look here; come along with me. I'll be like your dog, and do everything you ask me. I'll kill him if you tell me, and Judith Hayle, too. There, you wouldn't find one of your sort ready like that.'

Frantic with dread, Marjorie looked wildly round as she strove to free her wrist.

'Why, what a struggling little thing you are,' he whispered. 'Can't you see that I like you, and wouldn't hurt you for the world? What's the good of holding off like this? No one can see you; there isn't anybody within a couple of miles of where we are, and you promised me another kiss.'

'Let me go,' cried Marjorie hoarsely. 'I did not mean it. I was half wild when I said that to you. Look here; take my watch and my rings, and I have

some money here. I did not mean all that. Let go or I will call for help.'

'Well,' he said coolly, 'call for help. I'm not afraid; you are, and you won't call—I know better than that. Look here, you know what you said.'

She looked sharply round and shuddered.

'Yes,' she said huskily, 'but I was mad and foolish then. It was in an angry fit. I didn't mean it.'

'Didn't you?' he said, looking at her with a cunning smile. 'How easily you people can lie. You did mean it, and you made me a promise, and you're going to keep it.'

'No, no,' she cried wildly.

'You are,' he said, 'and I'm going to be paid. I'm only waiting for my chance.'

'I tell you no,' cried Marjorie. 'I did not mean it.'

'You meant it then, and you mean it now, and I'm going to keep my word when I can. I'm not a fool. Do you think I don't know why it all is? Not so blind as all that, my dear. It's plucky of you, and I like you the better for it, and some day you'll tell me how glad you are that—pst! someone coming,' he whispered, completely altering his manner and tone bowing obsequiously, and whining out an appeal to the dear kind lady to bestow a trifle on a poor young man out of work.

That night Marjorie lay awake thinking, half-repentant, half-glad; the latter feeling increasing till

there was a glow of triumph in her eyes as she seemed to be gazing down upon Glynne, cast off by her cousin, her enemy and rival no longer, but an unhappy despairing object humbled at her feet.

CHAPTER VI.

FACING THE UNKNOWN.

THE time was drawing nigh, and Sir John and his brother were sitting over their wine, when the former began upon matters connected with the wedding. Rolph had only left them that day, and was to return the next morning to meet them at the church, in company with a brother officer, ready to act as his best man. Then the wedding over, the happy pair were to start for the Continent ; and Brackley would be left to the brothers, both of whom looked blank and dispirited as they asked themselves what they were to do when the light of the place had gone.

And that was how the conversation first began. Sir John sighing, and saying that he should miss Glynne very much indeed.

‘Of course, I give lots of attention to my pigs and sheep, and the rest of them,’ he said dolefully ; ‘but Brackley won’t be the same, Jem, old fellow, when she’s gone. I shall miss her dreadfully.’

‘Yes,’ said the major, raising his claret to his lips, and setting the glass down again untouched, ‘we shall miss her dreadfully.’

Then, after a long conversation, Sir John had touched upon the subject of his brother's treatment of the bridegroom, and his conduct at the wedding.

They sat sipping their claret for some time, Sir John being very silent; and at last the long pause was followed by the major saying,—

‘Well, don't let's leave our darling. I suppose I may say “our darling,” Jack?’

‘My dear brother!’ exclaimed Sir John, grasping his hand.

‘I say then, don't let's leave our darling alone any longer. We shall have plenty of time to sip our wine of nights when we are alone, Jack. Let's go and let her pour out tea for us for what will pretty well be the last time.’

‘Hah! yes!’ said Sir John, rising slowly ‘for pretty well the last time, Jem, and—and—’

Sir John stopped short, for his voice broke, and the nerves in his fine florid face quivered.

The major laid one hand upon his brother's shoulder in good old schoolboy fashion, caught his right hand in his own, and remained gripping it warmly—a strong, firm, sympathetic grip, full of brotherly feeling; but he spoke no word.

Sir John was the first to break the silence.

‘Thank you, Jem,’ he said, ‘thank you, Jem. It's very weak and childish of me at my time of life, but it touches me home; it touches me the harder, too, that she is my only child; and—and—and, Jem, my

lad, don't jump upon me—I must own it to you now, and I will—I feel that I am making a great mistake.'

'Thank God!' cried the major fervently.

'Jem!'

'I say, thank God,' cried the major, 'that you see the truth at last, Jack, before it is too late.'

'No, no, Jem,' said Sir John sadly; 'I have not seen it before it is too late. It is too late. We cannot alter it now. I am in honour bound. I cannot interfere.'

'Hang honour!' cried the major excitedly. 'I'd give up all the honour in the world sooner than that girl's life should be blighted. Jack, Jack, my dear brother, we are old men now. We've had our fling of life. Let's think of our darling's happiness, and not of what the world thinks of us.'

'Too late, Jem! too late!' said Sir John.

'I tell you it is not too late, Jack. Hang it man, I'll do anything. I'll challenge and shoot this con-founded Rolph sooner than he shall have her.'

'Don't talk nonsense, Jem—don't talk nonsense. I've sounded Glynne well, and it is too late.'

'What! Do you mean to tell me that she would insist upon having him if you forbade it?' cried the major.

'She thinks that she is bound to him, and that it is impossible to retract, even if she wished.'

'But doesn't she wish to run back from this wretched business?'

‘No, she does not wish to run back from her promise.’

‘I don’t believe it,’ cried the major, over whose white forehead the veins stood up like a pink network.

‘It is true all the same,’ said Sir John sadly. ‘If she had but expressed the slightest wish, I’d have seen Rolph, even at this eleventh hour, and, as he would have called it, the match should be off.’

‘I will go and see her myself, Jack. I don’t want to insult you, my dear brother, but she does look up to me and my opinion a little. Let me try and win her to my way of thinking, and let’s get this wretched business stopped. She would never be happy, I am sure.’

‘Go and see her, Jem, by all means.’

‘You give me your leave?’

‘I do.’

The major uttered a sigh of relief, and smoothing his beard, and with his eyes beaming, he walked straight into the drawing-room, where Glynne was seated, looking very pale and beautiful, with her head resting upon her soft white hand, gazing full at the lamp. Marjorie and three lady friends were in the drawing-room, but they had evidently, out of respect for the young girl’s saddened state, retired to the end of the room, where they were engaged in conversation in a low tone of voice.

Glynne did not stir as the major entered, for she

was deep in thought; but she turned to him with a sweet, grave smile as he laid his hand upon hers.

‘Will you come into the conservatory, my dear?’ he said gently. ‘I want to talk to you.’

She rose without a word, and laid her hand upon his arm, letting her uncle lead her into the great, softly-lit corridor of flowers; while, as the major realised the difficulties of the task he had before him, he grew silent, so that they had walked nearly to the end before he spoke.

‘My dear child,’ he said, in a husky, hesitating voice, for, though he had often dashed with his men at the charge full into the dangers of the battlefield, he felt a peculiar sensation of nervous dread now at having to broach the business upon which he had come.

‘My dear child,’ he began again.

‘My dear uncle,’ she answered, tenderly.

‘You know my feelings respecting your approaching marriage?’

She looked up at him sadly, and the tears stood in her eyes.

‘Yes, uncle, dear, I know,’ she replied slowly.

‘Well, your father has now come over to my side, and he gives me his consent to see you, to win from you—’

‘Hush, uncle—dear uncle,’ said Glynne softly. ‘I know you love me—dearly, as if I were your own child.’

‘I do, I do indeed,’ he cried.

‘Then pray spare me all these painful words.’

‘Plain words to save you pain in the future,’ he said tenderly.

‘It is too late, uncle. I told my father that. It is too late.’

‘No, no, my darling, it is not too late,’ cried the major excitedly. ‘You are afraid of the talk and scandal. Bah! let them talk and scandalise till they get tired. What is it to us? Look here; we’ll start for the Continent to-morrow, and stay away till this business is forgotten. A nine days’ wonder, my child. There, there, you consent. By George, we’ll be off to-night—*now*. I’ll go and order the carriage at once. It will be round by the time you have got a few things together in a bag.’

‘Stop, uncle, dear uncle.’

‘No, no; your father will go with us, too.’

‘Glynne shook her head, and, putting one arm round his neck, kissed the old man fondly.

‘Hush, dear,’ she said; ‘you forget. I cannot—I will not hear another word. I am determined that I will hold to my promise.’

‘But, Glynne, my child,’ cried the major appealingly.

‘It is too late—it is too late,’ responded Glynne. ‘And now, uncle, if you love me, spare me further suffering.’

He waited for a few minutes, and resumed the attack, but without effect; and just as he was gazing despairingly in his niece’s face Sir John entered, looking inquiringly at both, when Glynne went smilingly to his side at once, and laid her hands upon his breast.

‘Dear father,’ she said tenderly, ‘let my last few hours at home be undisturbed by pain.’

‘My darling,’ said Sir John softly, ‘you are mistress here. Jem, old fellow, you have spoken.’

‘Delivered my charge, Jack, and failed. I retire broken from the field.’

Glynne held out her hand to him, and when he took it she leaned towards him to kiss his lips.

About an hour later Mason the maid learned a secret which she afterwards confided to her intimates in the servants’ hall.

Mason went up to Glynne’s bedroom to carry there a lately-arrived packet containing a portion of her mistress’s *trousseau*.

She had hardly entered the room when she noted that the door connecting it with Glynne’s little study was ajar, and a sigh taught her that it was occupied.

‘I’ll take it in, and she’ll open it at once,’ thought Mason, who was burning with curiosity to see the contents of the package ; and, going lightly across to the door, she pressed it open, and then stood petrified at the scene before her.

For Glynne was kneeling before a chair with her face buried in her hands sobbing violently, while in piteous tones she breathed out the agony of her heart in the wild appeal,—

‘Heaven help me and give me strength ! It is more than I can bear.

CHAPTER VII.

A PROBLEM OF CONJUNCTION.

WANT of exercise and incessant study had placed their effects on Alleyne. The greyness was showing in streaks in his hair, and the lines seemed deeper in his forehead, as Lucy came gently into the observatory where her brother was apparently intent upon some tremendous problem.

Lucy, too, looked thinner than of old. There was a careworn aspect in her face, and her eyes told tales of tears more often shed than is the custom with young ladies as a rule.

As she entered the observatory and closed the door, she stood gazing at her brother with her hands clasped, thinking of the money that had been expended upon his scientific pursuits, keeping them all exceedingly poor, and, for result, helping to make Alleyne a worn and old-looking man.

What a thing it seemed, she thought ; how changed their home and all their simple life had become, and all through their proximity to Brackley.

‘I wish we had gone away from here months upon months ago,’ she said to herself impatiently. ‘We

might have been so happy anywhere else. And I thought, too, that everything was going to be so pleasant, with Glynne for my companion, only people seemed to have leagued themselves against us; and I'm sure there's no harm in either poor Moray or myself, only we couldn't help liking someone else. Heigho !'

'Who's that?' cried Alleyne, starting, for Lucy's sigh had been uttered aloud. 'Oh, you, Lucy,' he said, dropping his eyes again.

'I've only come to see you, dear, for a little while. Moray, darling, how late you were last night.'

He started wildly, caught the hands she had laid caressingly upon his shoulders, and stared in her face.

'How did you know?' he cried hoarsely.

'Don't, dear; you hurt me.'

He relaxed his grasp, and she felt him trembling.

'Don't be angry with me, Moray,' she said, bursting into tears. 'It was only because I loved you and suffered with you. I can't bear to see my darling brother like this.'

'You—you were watching me?' he stammered.

'Don't call it by that unkind title, dear,' she said. 'I cannot bear it. I know how you grieve, and I have often sat at my window and seen you go out of a night, and waited till you came back. One night—don't be angry with me, Moray,' she cried, throwing her arms about his neck—'I followed you to the Fir

Mount, to see you were up there watching Glynne's window.'

'Lucy! Last night?'

'No, no, dear,' she cried in alarm. 'Don't—don't be so fierce with me. It was only once.'

He uttered a low, hoarse sigh as if of relief.

'It was one night when you had quite frightened me by being so despondent. I was afraid you meant to do yourself some mischief, and I stole out to see where you went. As soon as I understood why you had gone there, I came back.'

'Was it so strange a thing for an astronomer to go out to a high place where he could see some planet rise?'

Lucy was silent for a few moments.

'No, dear,' she said at last in a whisper, 'nor for a man who loves to go and watch the house that holds all that is dear to him in life. But, Moray, dear, what is the matter with your hand?'

'Nothing,' he said, hastily thrusting his bandaged hand into his pocket. 'Only a cut—from a knife nothing more. There—that will do. Why did you come?'

'It is the twenty-fifth, Moray. I thought I'd come and remind you.'

'Twenty-fifth,' he said hurriedly; 'twenty-fifth?'

'Yes, dear, Glynne Day's wedding.'

She regretted speaking the next instant, as she saw her brother's head go down upon his hand; but he

looked up at her directly, and, to her surprise, with a peculiar smile.

‘Thank you for reminding me, dear,’ he said. ‘I hope she will be very happy.’

‘I don’t,’ cried Lucy petulantly, ‘and I’m sure she won’t be. Oh, how could she be so foolish as to engage herself to such a man as that!’

Alleyne did not reply, but sat gazing before him at a broad band of sunlight which cut right across the portion of the great room where he was seated. It seemed to him that Glynne was the bright bar of light that had been thrown across the dark, shadowy life that he had led ; and to make the idea more real, the passing of a cloud cut the ray suddenly, and the great, chill room, with its uncouth instruments, its piles of scientific lumber, and its dust, was gloomy once again.

The bright ray had come and gone. It was but a memory now, and Alleyne uttered a sigh of relief, for he told himself that the past was dead, and he must divide it from his present existence by a broad, well-marked line.

‘Have you nothing to say, Moray?’ whispered Lucy at last. ‘Do you not understand? Are you not going to make one more effort to make her change her purpose.’

‘My dear Lucy!’ he said tenderly.

That was all, but he took her in his arms and kissed her, as if she were still the little child whom he used to pet and play with years before.

As soon as he released her she stood looking at him with her brows knit for a few moments, and then said,—

‘Moray, should you mind very much if I were to go?’

‘Go?’ he said dreamily. ‘Go?’

‘Yes; to see Glynne married.’

She saw a twitching of the nerves of his face as he realised her meaning, and was regretting her question, when he said softly,—

‘No, my dear, no. Go if you wish it. Yes, go.’

He turned from her and resumed his work, making figures rapidly on a sheet of paper before him, and as, he evidently wished to be alone, she stole softly out of the room.

Half-an-hour later Alleyne, who had left his work as soon as Lucy quitted him, and gone to a window which overlooked the road, saw his sister, very plainly dressed in white, go along the lane towards Brackley Church.

He did not stir, but stood watching till the white dress disappeared among the tall columnar fir trees.

Then came another figure going in the same direction, and in his moody, despairing state, Alleyne hardly noted for a few moments who it was, till the figure stopped short to turn and talk to a tall, gaunt-looking man, whom Alleyne recognised as Hayle, the man he had seen when Oldroyd was attending him, and it was the latter now speaking.

After a few minutes conversation, Alleyne saw Hayle shake his head, and go in one direction, while Oldroyd went in the other, that taken by Lucy, toward the church.

Then Alleyne turned from the window with a blank look of despair in his eyes, a strange vacant wildness of aspect in his drawn and haggard countenance. He walked to and fro. He threw himself into his great chair, but only to spring up again and pace the room with eager, hurried steps.

He sank helplessly down upon his chair once more, and rested his throbbing brow upon his hands, his misery so acute that he felt that he was going mad; but as the time went on, a dull feeling of lethargy came over him, and he sat there crouched together till Mrs Alleyne came into the room and touched him with her cold, thin hand, when he started.

‘My boy!’ she said tenderly, as she laid her hands upon his shoulders, ‘is it so hard to bear?’

‘Hard? Yes, cruelly hard,’ he said, with a sigh of misery.

‘And in turn we have to bear these agonies,’ she said softly. ‘I have known them, too, my boy, hours of despair when life all looked too black to be faced, and there seemed to be nothing to do but die.’

He looked at her inquiringly.

‘Yes, my boy, these troubles have been mine at times, and I have thought like this—thought as you

have thought since that woman came between us to blast our hearth.'

'Hush!' he cried, almost fiercely. 'Not one disloyal word against her, mother. It was my ill-balanced nature led me wrong, and she never came between you and me.'

'Forgive me, my boy,' cried Mrs Alleyne, as he took her in his arms. 'I know, I know. Always my own true loving son. But it seems so hard that she should have treated you as she did.'

'Hush, mother! Hush!' he replied. 'She was not to blame.'

'Not to blame?' retorted Mrs Alleyne. 'You defend her, but, had she not led you on by her soft words and wiles, you had never come to think of her like this. But she will repent: so sure as she marries that man, she will bitterly repent.'

'You are giving me cruel pain, mother,' said Alleyne sadly.

'My boy! my own brave boy!' cried Mrs Alleyne, clinging to him. 'I will say no more! I will be silent, indeed. No word on the subject shall ever leave my lips again. There: forgive me.'

'Forgive you, mother!' he said softly, as he drew her more closely, and kissed her lips, 'I have nothing to forgive. You felt what you thought to be a just indignation on my behalf. It is so easy to think those we love must be in the right, so hard to see when we alone are in the wrong. There, let us talk

about it no more, for— Why, Lucy! what is the matter?’

Lucy hurried into the observatory, looking hot and excited, threw herself into a chair, sobbing hysterically, and for some time not a word could be obtained from her.

Mrs Alleyne was the first to get an answer, as she at last exclaimed,—

‘Then someone has insulted you?’

‘No, no!’ she cried; and then more emphatically, ‘No! Glynne, Glynne!’

Then her sobs choked her utterance, and she hid her face in her hands, sobbing in the most violently hysterical manner, till, utterly exhausted, she lay back in the chair so still and reduced that Alleyne grew alarmed, and, hurrying out of the room, he set off for Oldroyd.

‘Miss Alleyne? Taken ill?’ cried the young doctor excitedly. ‘I’ll be with you directly. Has she heard of that terrible business?’

‘Business? What business?’ faltered Alleyne.

‘What! haven’t you heard?’ cried Oldroyd in amazement. ‘Why, about Miss Day.’

Alleyne gazed at him enquiringly, and Oldroyd leaned forward and said a few words in Alleyne’s ear, making him sink back silent and ghastly into a chair.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FALLEN STAR.

‘THERE, I think everything is in train,’ said Sir John, as he and his brother sat together over a final cigar before retiring for the night, for Glynne and the friends staying in the house had gone to their rooms, and the brothers were at last alone.

‘Yes, Jack, all seems ready for action.’

‘Except you, Jem.’

‘I?—I’m ready.’

‘No; you ought to have had a new suit, Jem.’

‘No; I said I would not,’ cried the major; ‘and I’ve kept to that, and that alone. I’ve given way in everything else. Let me alone there.’

‘All right; all right. I say no more. Change the subject, Jem; we won’t have words to-night. Glynne looks lovely; doesn’t she?’

‘Fit bride for a god,’ said the major. ‘Bless her!’

‘Amen. Calm, satisfied and happy in her choice.’

‘H’m.’

The major coughed a little.

‘She does, Jem,’ cried Sir John hastily. Every-

body said so to-night. I should have liked that little lassie, Lucy Alleyne, to have been asked to be a bridesmaid though ; but after what has passed it was as well not.'

'Yes,' said the major gruffly, 'just as well not.'

'Pretty girl that Marjorie Emlin. Best looking bridesmaid we shall have.'

'Humph ! yes. Can't say I like her, Jack.'

'Prejudiced ? old man.'

'Perhaps so ; but those white-faced red-haired girls always have a foxey look to me. There, there, I've done, and I'll play cavalier to her to-morrow if I get the chance.'

'That you will, Jem, I know. Trust you soldiers for that. Sad dogs. Why, Jem, old chap, I never said anything to you before,' chuckled Sir John, 'but 'pon my soul, I thought once you were going to make play and get married before Glynne.'

The major moved uneasily in his chair, and suppressed a sigh.

'Nice little girl, Jem,' continued Sir John. 'I liked her myself ; but only a woman. There were rumours about her. You didn't hear, I suppose ?'

'Yes, I did,' said the major, biting hard at his cigar.

'Well, no wonder. It was enough to make the best girl in the world a little wild. Shut up in that dreary house by herself, for you can't call it anything else.'

‘Yes; dull life for a young girl,’ assented the major, ‘Never heard—er—er—who it was?’

‘I? Wouldn’t listen to the confounded scandal. Some d—d chatter about her getting up at daylight to go and meet a man. Did you?’

‘Hah!’ said the major, drawing a deep breath; ‘I wouldn’t hear.’

‘Right, Jem, right. By the way, I think we’ve got every one here who ought to come, and we’ll make the day go off with a swing, old fellow. Is there any fellow I ought to have asked on Miss Emlin’s account?’

‘No,’ said the major grimly; ‘you’ve got him for another purpose.’

‘Eh? What do you mean?’

‘She wanted Rolph herself.’

‘Impossible! Why, the girl’s devotedly attached to Glynne, affectionate in the extreme. See what a beautiful diamond bracelet she has given her.’

‘Yes, that kind of girl always is. It’s a way they have of showing their spite.’

‘Nonsense! Who told you that rubbish?’

‘The young lady’s aunt—Rob’s mother.’

‘The deuce!’

‘But she was quite right. She said such an union was better avoided, and that her niece had long ago acquiesced in the wisdom of the arrangement. There, my cigar’s nearly out, and I’m ready for bed.’

‘Don’t hurry. I was thinking again of how well Glynne looked when she said good-night.’

‘Lovely,’ said the major, with a sigh.

‘Rolph, too,’ cried Sir John enthusiastically, and as if he had wound himself up to make the best of everything. By George, what a specimen of a man and a soldier he looked when he went to-night. Isn’t he grand, Jem? Wouldn’t you have liked to have three or four hundred such fellows in the Indian war?’

‘Yes; in the ranks,’ said the major.

‘Jem!’

‘All right. He’s a grand specimen of humanity, and as he says hard as a brick.’

‘Sorry to lose her, poor darling; but glad now when it’s over, and all this mob of company gone. Have another cigar?’

‘No; past twelve, and I want to get a good night’s rest before this comes off. Good-night, Jack! God bless you, lad! Happiness for our darling shall be my prayer to-night.’

Sir John started from his seat, and caught his brother’s hands. His lips moved, but no words came for some moments, and a couple of tears trickled slowly down his cheeks.

‘Thank you, Jem,’ he said at last hoarsely, and the brothers separated without another word.

The butler came yawning into the little office-study to put out the lamp, and half-an-hour later the

house, full as it was of relatives and wedding guests, was silent as the grave.

The clock over the stables chimed the quarters and struck the hours, while everyone slept soundly except Marjorie Emlin, who lay motionless, thinking of the coming day, and burnt up as if by a fever.

Only a few hours now and her last hope gone, and as she lay there a curious jangling sound as of the wedding bells being rung derisively by demons seemed to drive her mad.

A few hours before she had been hanging about Glynne, smiling and talking of the happy days to come, and of how dear and good and brave a fellow Rob was, and how they must both try now to wean him from his love of athletic sports, till Glynne grew weary and frowned a little, seeking her father's society as much as attention to the friends staying in the house would allow.

Then came the good-night of all, and silence fell upon the house.

Major Day slept soundly enough, but his dreams were troubled. Lucy Alleyne had a good deal to do with them, and he lay confused, and fighting hard to go after her, and bring her back, for she was getting into a bad habit of eloping every morning at daybreak, a habit which he felt ought to be stopped, but it was impossible he felt to bring it to an end.

He was in the height of his trouble and perspiring

freely when the object of Lucy's affections seized him roughly by the shoulder and shook him.

'Jem, Jem, wake up, man ; wake up !'

The major started up in bed, and the light confused him, but he made out that his brother was there half dressed holding a bell glass flat candlestick over him.

'What's the matter ?'

'Don't know. Slip on your dressing-gown. Someone ill, I'm afraid.'

'Tut, tut, tut !' ejaculated the major, hurrying on trousers and dressing gown in prompt military fashion, while his brother explained.

'I was fast asleep and awoke by a cry. A few moments after it came again, and I slipped on some things, got a light, and came out into the corridor.'

'Fancy.'

'No, I'm sure of it. Ready ?'

'Nearly.'

'Let's go and see then. I don't like to be prowling about the house alone in the night.'

'Why ?' said the major gruffly. 'Because it's your own ?'

'Don't banter. I feel sure that the cry came from Miss Emlin's room.'

'Well, why not ring for the maids ?'

'Because I consider it to be my duty to see if anything is the matter first. Ready ?'

'Yes.'

‘Come on.’

Sir John led the way out into the corridor, and the brothers listened with their shadows thrown grotesquely on the walls ; but all was perfectly silent, and the major looked enquiringly at his brother.

‘Well,’ he said ; ‘isn’t it a pity to disturb the house ?’

‘Come this way.’

Sir John led the way to one of the doors, stopped listening a few moments, and then knocked softly.

No answer, and he knocked again.

‘Yes,’ came in a quick musical voice ; ‘who is there ?’

‘I, my dear,’ said Sir John. ‘Don’t be alarmed. I thought I heard a cry come from your room. Are you quite well ?’

‘Oh, yes, thank you. I must have cried out in my sleep then. I’m afraid I do sometimes.’

‘Thank you, my child. Sorry to have disturbed you. Good-night, my dear.’

‘Good-night, Sir John.’

‘Humph ! Satisfied ?’ said the major gruffly.

‘No, come along.’

Sir John tapped at another door, but the inmate of the room made no reply.

‘Hang it all, Jack, don’t rouse up all the house,’ whispered the major. ‘There’s nothing the matter, or someone else would have heard it.’

Just at that moment the deep baying of a dog

was heard from the yard, followed by a long, low howl.

‘There is something the matter,’ cried Sir John, ‘or the dog wouldn’t make that noise. Here, let’s wake Glynne, and let her go round and see who’s ill.’

‘No, no, don’t do that, man,’ cried the major.

But his brother was already at his child’s door, where he knocked sharply.

‘Glynne, Glynne, my dear.’

A low smothered cry, coming as if from a distance, was the response, and the dog’s baying recommenced.

CHAPTER IX.

TORN FROM HER SPHERE.

THE act was simultaneous.

Moved as if by the same set of nerves, Sir John Day and his brother dashed themselves against the door again and again, but the panelling was strong, and it was evidently well fastened within, and, for the time being, the door refused to yield. Then, as the brothers literally hurled themselves against it in their rage of disappointment, the fastenings gave way, and the door flew back with a crash, while Sir John fell forward into the darkness upon his knees.

‘Quick, Jem, the light,’ he cried, as he gathered himself up; but the major had forestalled him, and stepped back to take the candlestick from where it had been set down.

He had just passed the threshold, casting the light before him into the chamber, when Sir John’s hand was clapped upon his shoulder, and the candlestick snatched from his hand.

‘Stand back, Jem, and guard the door. I am her father.’

The old officer promptly obeyed, and the door was

swung to upon him, as others were being opened along the passage, and excited enquiries began to be heard on every hand.

For Sir John, in his one quick glance, as the light flashed into the room, had seen that which caused his prompt action. The door leading into Glynne's little studio was wide open, and the current of soft, moist night air which struck his cheek told that the conservatory and its windows must be open too.

All this came to him in a flash as, after swinging to the door he had forced, Sir John ran to where, dishevelled, and with her face bleeding and distorted by the savage manner in which her cries for help had been stopped, lay Glynne by the bedside. She was insensible now, though a faint groan escaped her as he tenderly raised her from the carpet, and laid her upon the bed, a pang of combined rage and horror shooting through him as he felt one arm drop in a strangely unnatural way, which told that the bone had snapped.

One glance round, as he battled with his agony, showed how terrible a struggle had taken place; chairs were overturned, a little table, with its load of feminine knick-knacks, lay upon its side, and on every hand there were traces of the strife.

Sir John, who was trembling violently, grasped all this as he hurried back to the door, to find that the whole house had now been alarmed, and people were gathering fast.

‘Find Morris, Jem,’ said Sir John, in a hoarse voice. ‘Quick! send for Oldroyd.’

‘Yes,’ said the major, with military promptitude; ‘but, one word—Glynne?’

Sir John made an impatient gesture, and his brother ran down the corridor at once, the frightened women giving way at his approach, while their host looked sharply round at the scared faces of those present.

‘Ah, Mason,’ he cried, ‘go in to your mistress.’

‘Sir John, what can I do?’ cried a piteous voice. ‘Dearest Glynne, pray, pray let me help.’

He turned sharply upon the speaker to see Marjorie, with her beautiful hair lightly looped up, but resting upon her long pale blue *peignoir*; and as the wild, troubled eyes met his, Sir John softened a little towards her.

‘Thank you,’ he said hastily. ‘It is no place for you, my child. Yes: go to her. You are a woman, and your gentle face should be at her side.’

Marjorie darted into the room after Mason, and Sir John barred the door against further entrance.

‘Here, Miss Emlin,’ he whispered, ‘secure the door from within. No one enters till the doctor comes.’

Then, gathering presence of mind, he hurriedly responded to the enquiries being made, and in a few minutes the passage was once more clear.

The major returned then, and his eyes looked searchingly into his brother’s.

‘This way,’ said Sir John. ‘Her maid and Miss Emlin are with her. We can do nothing there.’

Major Day made an impatient gesture, but his old discipline prevailed, and he followed his brother to the studio door, which opened upon the corridor.

But it, too, was fastened, and Sir John stepped back to the bedroom door and tapped sharply.

There was a rustling sound within, and the door was held ajar by Mason, whose face looked scared and drawn, while a low, piteous moan came to their ears.

‘Quick!’ said Sir John. ‘Go round and open the other door. Shut this first, and admit no one, I say, but the doctor.’

The door was closed with a chain, and they heard the slipping back of the bolts of the little studio, Sir John waiting to give the maid time to go back into the bed-chamber before he opened the door, and entered with his brother.

All was in its customary state here, but the conservatory door was open, and, upon entering there, it was to find that the window was wide, and a long strand of the wistaria lay upon the floor, as if it had been torn off by someone who had mounted from below, or else had become entangled by the climber’s dress, and fallen from it when the inside of the window was reached.

The major was at his brother’s side, and together they looked out, holding a candle down to see plainly enough that the leaves and tender twigs of the beauti-

ful climber that wreathed the place had been broken and torn down in several places, the big cable-like twisted main stem having evidently been utilised as a rope ladder by whoever had climbed up.

The brothers looked at each other.

‘Her favourite creeper, Jem,’ said Sir John, with a groan—‘her destruction.’

‘Jack?’ whispered the major, in an appealing voice. Only the one word, but so full of question that Sir John bent toward him and whispered a few words.

The major turned away, and marched for the door, but his brother overtook him.

‘To my room.’

‘What for?’

‘My pistols.’

‘Jem!’

‘I’ll shoot him like a dog.’

Sir John’s hand closed tightly upon his brother’s arm, and they glared at each other in silence for a few moments, while twice over there came a feeble groan through the door from the adjoining chamber.

‘No,’ said Sir John at last, with his voice trembling from emotion; ‘I am her father. It is my task, or her betrothed’s. Jem,’ he whispered excitedly, ‘what am I to say to Rolph?’ ‘Jem,’ he whispered again, with the hands which clung to his brother trembling violently, ‘you—you don’t think—they were to be married to-day—he came to her window last night?’

‘No,’ said the major sternly; ‘give the devil his due. It was not he.’

There was silence in the little room, about which lay the many little books and drawings favoured by her who lay moaning and insensible in the next room. Here was a sketch of the father; there one of the uncle; close by, arch and mocking of aspect, a clever representation of Lucy Alleyne; and, in a fit of fury, the major strode to the wall, tore it down, and stamped it under foot.

‘What cursed stroke of fate brought them here?’ he said hoarsely.

‘Hush! This is no time for loud anger, Jem. We must act—like men—for her sake, old fellow! My God, Jem! what sin have I committed that the punishment should be struck at me through her? My poor, poor girl!’

He sank into a chair, sobbing like a child; but as his brother’s hand was laid upon his shoulder, he sprang up again.

‘Yes,’ he said huskily. ‘I’m ready. We need not search. We know enough. But, Jem, we must be silent. I can’t have all the horrible scandal spread abroad. We must, for her sake, hush it up.’

‘Hush it up!’ said the major bitterly. ‘Jack, the news is being spread already. You sent one messenger out a quarter-of-an-hour ago.’

Just then the door leading into the bedroom opened, and Marjorie appeared, quite calm and self-possessed.

‘Brandy or sal-volatile!’ she said in a quick, decisive whisper. ‘She is coming to, but deadly faint and weak.’

Half-an-hour later, Oldroyd was there, and busy in attendance till daybreak; while Sir John and his brother sat waiting till he joined them in the library—the calm, business-like doctor, apparently with no thought outside the condition of his patient.

He came into the room, bowed, looked from one brother to the other, and waited to be questioned.

Sir John’s lips parted, but no words came, and he turned his eyes imploringly to his brother, who drew himself up and began in his prompt military way; but his brief question was almost inaudible towards the end.

‘How is she?’

‘Suffering terribly from shock, sir, and exhaustion. Her left arm is fractured above the elbow; but it is the mental strain we have to fear.’

‘You will stay of course?’ said the major.

‘I only came to you for a few moments, gentlemen, and am going back to my patient now.’

No further question was asked, and the brothers were left alone, to sit in silence till the major said,—

‘You must send some kind of message over to The Warren, Jack.’

‘Eh? Yes, yes, I suppose so,’ said Sir John bitterly; ‘and get rid of these people in the house. Do that

for me, Jem. I'm broken, lad—twenty years older since we shook hands last night. Who's there?' he cried with a start, as there was a tap at the door.

Whoever knocked took this for a command to enter; and, looking very pale and wild-eyed, but perfectly self-possessed, Marjorie entered and fixed her eyes on Sir John.

'Will you kindly order the carriage?'

'Yes—yes, my dear,' he said. 'Thank you for what you have done; but you wish to leave us?'

She looked at the old man half-wonderingly before answering.

'A message must be sent to my cousin,' she said in her sweet, musical voice; 'the wedding cannot take place to-day.'

'No, no; of course not,' cried the major.

'And I thought it would be kinder to him, poor fellow, for me to be the bearer of these terrible tidings. A letter would be so cold and dreadful. Oh, Sir John,' she cried with a hysterical sob, as she flung herself at his knees, 'it is too horrible to speak of. Poor darling Glynne! My poor cousin! It will drive him mad!'

'Hush, my dear; be calm; try and be calm,' whispered Sir John, laying his hand gently upon her head.

'Yes,' she said amidst her sobs, 'I am trying so hard, dear Sir John, for everybody's sake. My poor aunt! It will nearly kill her. I thought it would be

so much better if I went myself to break the dreadful news.'

'Yes,' said Sir John, raising her. 'Heaven bless you for your forethought. It is a time when we want a gentle woman's help.'

He looked at his brother, who read his wish.

'I will order the carriage round,' he said. 'In an hour?'

'No, no, as soon as possible,' said Marjorie wildly. 'They must not hear the news from the village. Poor, poor, darling Glynne!' she cried, bursting into a fresh burst of sobs, which made her words almost inaudible. 'All her jewels gone, too. She must have been trying to protect them when the wretches struck her down.'

Within half-an-hour Marjorie was on her way back to The Warren; and soon after breakfast, of the wedding guests not one was left, while the news rapidly spread that 'Doctor' Oldroyd had been fetched suddenly in the night to Brackley, where he found Sir John's daughter in a violent fever, and that she was now delirious, and in danger of being taken to the church as a bride, indeed, but as the bride of death.

CHAPTER X.

THE LITTLE ORB TURNS ROUND.

THERE was but one thought in the minds of father and uncle at Brackley, and that was to silence busy tongues, get Glynne sufficiently well to move, and go right away abroad ; and in Oldroyd they had a willing coadjutor, and one who seemed not to have a thought beyond his profession.

The major had been half mad, and ready to follow the bent of his suspicions again and again ; but robbery as well as outrage appeared to have influenced the man who had escaped unseen, since the greater part of the valuable jewels, including a diamond bracelet given by Marjorie to the bride, were missing, and he felt that he was wrong.

Sir John prevailed.

‘Jem,’ he said, ‘if I knew who it was I’d shoot him like a dog—curse him! No: I couldn’t wait to fire, I’d strangle him ; but I can’t have this published abroad if we can hush it up. I won’t have my child dragged into a witness box to give evidence against the devil who has wrought us this ill. We must bear it, Jem, and wait.’

‘But, my dear Jack—’

‘But, my dear Jem—I am her father. What would our darling wish if she could speak to us—if we could speak to her upon what it would be best to do?’

The major bowed his head, and as far as possible a veil was drawn over the events of that night.

Rumour was pretty busy during the next month, during which period several stories were afloat, but only one bore the stamp of truth—that, out of despair some said, Captain Rolph obtained leave of absence, and went off to Norway, shooting, while Mrs Rolph and her niece accompanied him as far as Hull, and then continued their journey to Scarborough’.

That was perfectly true, Mrs Rolph having her hands pretty full with Marjorie, who also turned ill, having bad, nervous, hysterical fits, and refusing absolutely to go outside The Warren door without having tight hold of Mrs Rolph’s arm; and even then she was constantly turning her eyes wildly round as if in expectation of seeing someone start out from behind bush or hedge.

‘The shock to her system,’ Mrs Rolph used to say to herself, and she became increasingly gentle toward the girl whose nerves had been shattered by the affair at The Hall.

By this time the shutters were all closed at Brackley, for, after Sir John had been severely blamed for not getting down some big physician when Glynne’s brain fever was at its worst, people came to the con-

clusion that he knew what he was about, for if ever a clever practitioner did settle down in a place, it was 'Doctor' Oldroyd, who had cured the young lady in a wonderfully short space of time. For the month at its end found the Days in Italy, where Glynne had been recommended to go on account of her health.

Oldroyd consequently was on the road to fame—that is the fame which extended for a radius of six miles; but his pockets were very little the heavier, and he still looked upon men who kept banking accounts with a feeling akin to awe.

Change in the neighbourhood of Brackley extended no further. The blunt-eyed, resident policeman, somehow never managed to come across the poachers who made raids upon The Warren and upon Brackley during the absence of their owners; while over at Lindham, the doctor learned from old Mother Wattley, who grew more chatty and apparently younger, under her skilful medical man's care, that Ben Hayle—'my son-in-law'—had taken an acre of land, and was 'goin' to make a fortun' there as a florist; but when Oldroyd met the ex-keeper one day, and went over the garden with him, it seemed improbable that it would even pay the rent.

'Better turn to your old business, Hayle,' said Oldroyd.

'Easier said than done, sir,' replied the man. 'Old master gave me my chance when I was a young fool, and liked to do a bit o' poaching, believing honestly

then that all birds were wild, and that I had as good a right to them as anybody. But I soon found out the difference when I had to rear them, and I served him honest, and Mrs Rolph too, all those years, till she discharged me because of the captain's liking for my Judith.'

'But surely there were other places to be found by a man with a good character.'

'Didn't seem like it, sir. I tried till I was beat out, and then, in a kind of despairing fit, I went out with some of the lads, and you know what I got for my pains.'

'Yes,' said the doctor, 'and it ought to be a lesson for you, Hayle.'

'Yes, sir, it ought ; but you see, once a man takes to that kind of work it's hard to keep from it.'

'But, my good fellow, you may be laid by the heels in gaol at any time. I wondered you were not taken over that affair.'

'So I should have been, if I'd had any other doctor, sir,' said Hayle, with a meaning smile, 'and the police had been a little sharper. But you didn't chatter, and our fellows didn't, and so I got off.'

'But think, now ; you, the father of a young girl like Miss Hayle, what would her feelings be if you were sent to prison like that young fellow—what's his name—was.'

'Caleb Kent, sir?'

'Yes. What's become of him ? I haven't seen him lately.'

‘ Racketing about somewhere, sir. Me and him had a quarrel or two about my Judith. He was always hanging after her ; and it got so bad, at last, that I promised him a charge o’ shot in his jacket if he ever came anigh our place again. He saw I meant it, sir, and he has left the poor girl in peace.’

‘ Well, I must be off, Hayle.’

‘ Thankye for calling, sir. Been to see the old mother-in-law ?’

‘ Yes ; she keeps wonderfully well.’

‘ You mean you keep her wonderfully well, sir, Poor old girl, she’s not a bad one in her way.’

‘ No, and there’s nothing the matter with her but old age.’

‘ Hear that the missus is coming back to The Warren, sir ?’

‘ Yes, and that the Brackley people are on their way too. Look here, Hayle, shall I put in a word for you to Sir John ?’

‘ No thankye, doctor, let me bide ; things ’ll come right in time. Think there’ll be a wedding at the Hall, now, sir ? They tell me Miss Day’s got well and strong again.’

‘ I’ve enough to do with my people when they want me, Hayle,’ said the doctor, drily, ‘ and I never interfere about their private matters ; but, as you ask me that question, I should say decidedly not.’

The ex-keeper smiled, as if the doctor’s words coincided with his own thoughts, and he stood watch-

ing Oldroyd, as he rode off, getting a peep at Judith seated by the window working hard as he went by, the girl's face looking pale and waxen in the shade.

‘Fretting a bit, by the look of her, and those dark rings,’ said Oldroyd, as he rode away. ‘How much happier a place the world would be if there were no marrying and giving in marriage—no making love at all. Causes more worry, I think, than the drink.’

CHAPTER XI.

DRAWN TOGETHER.

‘WELL, dearest,’ said Mrs Rolph, ‘have you been all round?’

Rolph, who was leaning back in his chair in the library at The Warren, reading a sporting paper, uttered a growl.

‘Not satisfactory, dear?’

‘Satisfactory! the place has gone to rack and ruin. I don’t believe those cursed poachers have left a head of game on the estate; but I know who’s at the bottom of it, and he’d better look out.’

‘I’m very sorry, dear,’ said Mrs Rolph, going behind her son’s chair to stroke his hair. ‘The garden looks very nice; both Madge and I thought so. Why didn’t you run over now and then to see that the keeper was doing his duty.’

‘Run over?’ cried Rolph, savagely; ‘who was going to run over here for every fool one met to be pointing his cursed finger at you, and saying, “There goes the fellow who didn’t get married.”’

‘My dearest boy,’ said Mrs Rolph, soothingly, as she laid her cheek on the top of his head, ‘don’t fret

about that now. You know it's nearly eighteen months ago.'

'I don't care if it's eighteen hundred months ago—and do leave off, mother, you know I hate having my hair plastered down.'

Mrs Rolph kissed the place where her cheek had been laid, and then drew back, showing that the complaint had not been merited, for, so far from the hair being plastered down, there was scarcely any to plaster, Rolph's head being cropped close in athletic and on anti-Samsonic principles as regarded strength.

'It was very, very hard for you, my dearest, and it is most unfortunate that they should have chosen the same time to return as we did. You—er—heard that they are back?'

'Of course I did, and if you'd any respect for your son, you'd sell this cursed hole, and go somewhere else.'

'Don't—don't ask me to do that, Rob, dear,' said Mrs Rolph. 'I know your poor father looked forward to your succeeding to it and keeping it up.'

'I hate the place,' growled Rolph rustling his paper; and Mrs Rolph looked pleased, but she said nothing for some time. Then, very gently,—

'Rob, dearest, you are going to stay now you are here?'

'No; I'm going to Hounslow to-morrow.'

'Not so soon as that, dear,' said Mrs Rolph, pleadingly, as she laid her hand upon his shoulder.

‘Why not? What’s the good of staying here?’

‘To please your mother, dearest, and—Madge, who is in a terribly weak state. I had great difficulty in getting her back here.’

Rolph moved angrily, and crumpled up the paper, but Mrs Rolph bent down and kissed him.

‘There, all right,’ he said, ‘only don’t bother me about it so. I can’t forget that other cursed muddle, if you can.’

‘No, my dear, of course not, but you should try to. And, Rob, dear, be a little more thoughtful about dearest Madge. She has, I know, suffered cruelly in the past, and does so now at times when you seem neglectful—no, no, don’t start, dear; I know you are not, but girls are exacting, and do love to spoil men by trying to keep them at their feet.’

‘Like spaniels or pugs,’ growled Rolph, the latter being the more appropriate.

‘Yes, dear, but she will grow wiser in that direction, and you cannot be surprised at her anxiety. Rob, dearest, you must not blame her for her worship of one whom she looks upon as a demigod—the perfection of all that is manly and strong.’

‘Oh, no; it’s all right, mother,’ said Rolph, who felt flattered by the maternal and girlish adulation; ‘I’ll behave like a lamb.’

‘You’ll behave like my own true, brave son, dearest, and make me very happy. When shall it be, Rob?’

‘Eh? The marriage?’

‘Yes, dear,’ said Mrs Rolph, kneeling at his side and passing an arm about him.

‘Has Madge been at you about it?’

‘For shame, dearest! She would die sooner than speak. You know how she gave up to what you fancied would make you happy before. Never a word, never a murmur; and she took that poor unfortunate girl, Glynne, to her heart as a sister.’

‘D—n it all, mother, do let that cursed business rest,’ cried Rolph impatiently.

‘Yes, dearest, of course; pray forgive me.’

‘Oh, all right! But—er—Madge—she hasn’t seen her—hasn’t been over there?’

‘No, my love, of course not. There must be no further communication between our families. It was Sir John’s own wish, as you know. No one could have behaved more honourably, or with more chivalrous consideration than he did over the horribly distressing circumstances. But that’s all dead, past and forgotten now, and you need not fear any allusions being made in the place. It was quite wonderful how little was ever known outside the house. But there, no more past; let’s have present and future. Time is flying, Rob, dearest, and I’m getting an old woman now.’

‘And a deuced fine, handsome old woman, too,’ said Rolph, with an unwonted show of affection, for he passed his arm about her, and kissed her warmly. ‘I tell you what it is, old lady, I only wish I could

meet with one like you—a fine, handsome, elderly body, with no confounded damn-nonsense about her. I'd propose in a minute.'

'My dearest boy, what absurd stuff you do talk, when the most beautiful girl for miles round is waiting patiently for you to say,—“Come, and I will recompense you with my life's devotion for all your long suffering, and the agony of years.”'

'Just what I'm likely to say, mother,' said Rolph, grimly.

'But you will in your heart.'

'All right, I'll try. She will let me have my own way. But I say, mother, she has grown precious thin and old-looking while you have been on the Continent.'

'What wonder, dearest boy. Can a woman suffer, as she has about you for two years now, without showing the lines of care. But what of them. It will be your pleasant duty to smooth them all out, and you can, dearest, and so easily. A month after she is yours she will not look the same.'

Mrs Rolph's words were spoken in all sincerity, and there was a great deal in them as to their probabilities, but not in the direction she meant.

'Rob, dearest,' she whispered caressingly, soon after, 'when shall it be?'

'Don't know.'

'To set your mother's heart at rest—and hers.'

'Oh, very well, when you like; but hold hard a minute.'

‘Rob!’ cried Mrs Rolph in dismay, for her heart was beating fast with hope, and his words had arrested the throbbing.

‘I can’t have two of my important meetings interfered with. I’ve the Bray Bridge handicap, and a glove fight I must attend.

‘Rob, my darling!’

‘But I must go to them. The confounded service takes up so much of my time, that I’ve neglected my athletics shamefully.’

Marjorie came in from the garden just then, and as she appeared at the French window, the careworn, hunted look in her eyes, and a suggestion of twitching about the corners of her lips, fully justified her athletic cousin’s disparaging remarks.

‘Ah, my darling!’ cried Mrs Rolph, rising.

‘I beg pardon, aunt dear. I did not know you and Rob were engaged.’

‘Don’t go, dearest,’ said Mrs Rolph, holding out her hands, her tone of voice making Marjorie’s eyes dilate, and as she began to tremble violently, a deathly pallor overspread her cheeks, and she tottered and then sank sobbing in Mrs Rolph’s arms.

‘My darling—my darling!’ whispered her aunt. ‘There—there! Rob, dearest, help me!’

Rolph rose from his chair, half-pleased, half-amused by his mother’s action, as she shifted the burden to his great muscular arms.

‘Help her to the couch, my love. Why, she is all

of a tremble. I'll go and fetch my salts. Rob, dearest, can't you bring back the colour to her cheeks?'

She moved slowly toward the door in quite a stage exit, smiling with satisfaction as she saw her son make no effort to place the trembling woman upon the couch, but holding her to his breast, while, slowly and timidly, her hands rose to his neck, gained faith and courage, and by the time the door closed upon the pair, Madge was clinging tightly, and for the first time for two years felt that the arms which encircled her held her firmly.

'Rob!' she cried wildly, as she raised her head to gaze wildly in his eyes.

'All right, pussy,' he said. 'The mater says we are to forget all the past, and forgive, and all that sort of thing, and the event is to be a fixture, short notice and no flam.'

'You mean it, Rob—darling?'

'Of course,' he cried; and his lips closed upon hers.

'There,' he said, after a time; 'now let's go and have a quiet walk and talk.'

'In the garden? Yes!'

'Hang the garden! outside. I don't want the old girl to be hanging about us, patting us on the back and watching for every kiss.'

'No, no,' she whispered, as she clung to him, as if fearing to lose him before she had him fast. 'Except for this, Rob, dear, I wish we had not come back to The Warren.'

‘Hallo!’ he cried, boisterously; ‘jealous of Judy, pet? Why, I haven’t seen her for months? That’s all over, and I’m going to be your own good boy.’

‘It wasn’t that, Rob. I was afraid.’

‘What of? Losing me? Oh, you’re safe now,’ he cried, with a boisterous laugh.

‘No, dear Rob; it was not that, but of something else.’

‘What, Brackley?’ he said roughly, and with an angry scowl.

‘Oh, no, Rob,’ she cried, with a frightened look and a shudder as she covered his lips with hers. ‘Didn’t, pray, speak of that. It is too horrible. I didn’t mean that.’

‘What then?’

‘It was nothing about you, Rob, dearest. It was about myself. I was frightened, but no, not *now*,’ she whispered caressingly, as she nestled to him. ‘I shall always have your brave, strong, giant’s arms to be round me, to protect me against everybody.’

‘Of course,’ he said, complacently, as he smiled down at her. ‘But what are you afraid of?’

‘Oh; nothing,’ she whispered; ‘it’s because I’m weak and foolish. Oh, Rob, how grand it must be to feel big, and strong and brave. It was some time before we went away, I was out walking, and a man came out from among the hazel bushes.’

‘Eh?’ growled Rolph.

'It was that dreadful poacher who used to be about, and he asked for money, and I gave him some, dear, and then he became insulting, and tried to catch me in his arms, but I shrieked out and he ran away.'

'Caleb Kent?' growled Rolph.

'I think that is what he was called,' said Marjorie timidly; 'but I need not be afraid of him now, need I, Rob?'

'You may be afraid for him,' said Rolph, fiercely; 'for so sure as ever we meet any night, and he is poaching, I shall have an accident with my gun.'

'But you won't kill him, Rob. Don't do that, dearest; it would be too dreadful.'

'No; I won't kill him if I can help it. That would be too bad, eh? I won't nail his ears to the pump.'

'Ah, my darlings! here still,' said Mrs Rolph, who entered, smiling, but with the tears trickling down her cheeks. 'Madge, my child, what has become of my salts—you know, the cut-glass bottle with the gold top.'

'Never mind the salts, mother,' said Rolph, boisterously; 'sugar has done it. I've quite brought Madge to—haven't I, pussy?'

'Oh, Rob, dearest,' cried Madge, hiding her face upon his breast, and shuddering slightly as she nestled there, as if a cold breath of wind had passed over to threaten the blasting of her budding hopes.

‘It’s all right, mother, and—there as soon as you like. Come, little wifey to be, begin your duties at once. Big strong husbands want plenty of food when they are not training. They are like the lawyers who need refreshers. I’m choking for a pint of Bass No, no, mother ; let her ring. Satisfied?’

‘Rob, my darling, you’ve made me a happy woman at last—so proud, so very proud of my darling son.’

‘All right,’ cried Rolph, gruffly ; ‘but, look here, I’m not going to figure at Brackley over a business like this. I’m off back to barracks.’

‘So soon, Rob,’ cried Madge, and the scared look came into her eyes again, as she involuntarily glanced at the window as if expecting to see Caleb Kent peering in.

‘Madge, my darling ! Look at her, Rob.’

‘Bah ! what a cowardly, nervous little puss it is,’ cried Rolph, taking her in his arms, and she clung to him sobbing hysterically. ‘Look here, mother ; you’d better take a house, or furnished apartments in town at once, and we’ll get the business done there. Madge is afraid of bogies. Weak and hysterical, and that sort of thing. Get her away ; the place is dull, and the poachers are hanging about here a good deal.’

Marjorie uttered a faint shriek which was perfectly real.

‘Take us away at once, Rob, dear,’ she whispered

passionately; 'I can't bear to be separated from you now.'

'All right,' he said. 'I'll stop and take care of you till you're ready to start, and see you safe in town. You can go to a hotel for a day or two. Will that do?'

'Yes, dear ; admirably,' cried Mrs Rolph, eagerly ; and Marjorie uttered a sigh of consent that was like a moan of pain.

CHAPTER XII.

RE THE FOCUS.

NEWS reaches the servants' hall sooner than it does the drawing-room, and before long it was known at Brackley that a wedding was in the air.

Cook let it off in triumph one day at dinner. She had been very silent for some time, and then began to smile, till Morris, the butler, who had noted the peculiarities of this lady for years, suddenly exclaimed,—

‘Now then, what is it? Out with it, cook!’

‘Oh, don’t ask me; it’s nothing.’

‘Yes, it is,’ said the butler, with a wink directed all round the table. ‘What are you laughing at?’

‘It does seem so rum,’ cried cook, laughing silently till her face was peony-like in hue.

‘Well, you might give us a bit, cook,’ said the major’s valet. ‘What is it?’

‘They’ve—they’ve found the focus again,’ cried cook, laughing now quite hysterically.

‘Eh? Where?’ cried Morris.

‘Over at The Warren.’

‘What,’ cried the butler severely; ‘made it up? Cook, I should be sorry to say unpleasant things

to any lady, but if you were a man, I should tell you that you were an old fool.'

'Well, I'm sure!' cried cook, 'that's polite, when I heered it only this morning from the butcher, who'd just come straight from The Warren, where he heered it all.'

'What? That Captain Rolph had made it up with our Miss Glynne? Rubbish, woman, rubbish! After the way he pitched the poor girl over and went off shooting, that could never be.'

'If people would not be quite so clever,' said cook, addressing the assembled staff of servants round the table, 'and would not jump at things before they know, perhaps they'd get on a little better in life. As if I didn't know that she'd never marry now. I said as the captain had made up matters with his cousin, that carrotty-headed girl who came to be bridesmaid.'

'You don't mean it,' cried Morris.

'It's a fact,' said cook, 'and it's to come off at once.'

'What, her? Disgraceful!'

Cook smiled again, with the quiet confidence of knowledge, and ignoring the butler's remark, she fixed the maids in turn with her eye.

'Mrs Rolph has taken a furnished house in London for three months, and they're going to it next week, and as Perkins' man says, it do seem hard, after getting on for two years without delivering regular joints at the house for them to be off again.'

‘Well,’ said Mason, Glynne’s maid, contemptuously, ‘I wish the lady joy of him. A low, common, racing and betting man. I wouldn’t marry him if he was made of gold.’

‘Right, Mrs Mason,’ said Morris. ‘I don’t know what Nature was thinking about to make him an officer. No disrespect meant to those in the stables, but to my mind, if Captain Rolph—and I saw a deal of him when he was here—had found his—his—’

‘Focus,’ suggested cook, and there was a roar in which the butler joined, by way of smoothing matters over with his fellow-servant.

‘I meant to say level, cook. He would have been a helper, or the driver of a cab. He was never fit for our young lady.’

The servants’ hall tattle proved to be quite correct, for within a week The Warren was vacant again, Rolph being back at barracks, and Mrs Rolph and her niece at a little house in one of the streets near Lowndes Square, busily occupied in preparing the lady’s *trousseau*, for the marriage was to take place within a month.

It was not long after that the news reached The Firs, and Lucy became very thoughtful, and ended by feeling glad. She hardly knew why, but she was pleased at the idea of Captain Rolph being married and out of the way.

And now, by no means for the first time, a great longing came over Lucy to see Glynne Day again.

She knew that the family had been for a year and a half in Italy, and only heard by accident that they had returned to Brackley, so quietly was everything arranged. Then, as the days glided by, and she heard no more news, the longing to see Glynne again intensified.

She felt the tears come into her eyes and trickle down her cheeks as she thought of the terrible catastrophe—never even alluded to at The Firs—a horror which had saved her from being Rolph's wife, but at what a cost!

'Poor Moray!' she sighed more than once in her solitary communings. 'Poor Glynne! and they might have been by now happy husband and wife. It is too horrible—too dreadful. How could Fate be so cruel!'

Lucy shivered at times as she mentally called up the careworn, beautiful, white face of her old friend, who had never been seen outside the walls of the house, so far as she could learn, since her return. And at last, trembling the while, as if her act were a sin, instead of true womanly love and charity, she wrote a simple little letter to Glynne, asking to see her, for that she loved her very dearly, and that the past was nothing to them, and ought not to separate two who had always been dear friends.

She posted the letter secretly, feeling that mother and brother would oppose the act, and that day the rustic postman was half-a-crown the richer upon his

promising to retain and deliver into her own hands any letter addressed to her which might arrive.

Then she waited patiently for days in the grim, cheerless home, where her brother seemed to be settling down into a thoughtful, dreamy man, who was ageing rapidly, and whose eyes always looked full of some terrible trouble, which was eating away his life, while, if possible, Mrs Alleyne looked older, thinner, and more careworn than of yore.

Oldroyd came at intervals professionally, but there was a peculiar distance observed between him and Lucy, who treated him with petulant angry resentment, and he was reserved and cold.

But his visits did no good. There were no walks with the doctor, no garden flowers bloomed at the astronomer's touch. Alleyne studied harder than ever, and his name rose in reputation among the scientific, but he received no visitors, paid no calls, and only asked for one thing from those of his household—to be let alone.

A week had elapsed before the postman, with a great deal of mysterious action, slipped a note into Lucy's hand, making her run to her room trembling and feeling guilty, to hold the letter open, illegible for the tears which veiled her eyes.

At last, though, she read the few brief lines which it contained :—

‘Think of the past, Lucy, as of happy days spent

with one who loved you, and who is now dead. Better that we should never meet again. Better, perhaps, if I had never lived. God bless *you*, dear. Good-bye.'

Poor Lucy was too ill to appear at dinner that day, and for several more she did not stir out. Then Mrs Alleyne insisted upon her going for a walk, and, as if drawn by fate, she went straight toward the fir mount to climb to the top, where she could sit down and gaze at Brackley, and try to make out Glynne, who might be walking in the garden.

No : she saw no tall white figure there, and she felt that unless she borrowed some 'optick tube' from her brother's observatory, she was not likely to see her friend a mile away, and she stood there low-spirited and tearful.

'If I could only see her, and say,—“Glynne, sister, what is all that terrible trouble to us? You are still the only friend I ever loved,” and clasp her in my arms, and let her tears mingle with mine. Oh, please God,' she said, softly, speaking like a little child, as she sank upon her knees amongst the thickly-shed pine needles, and clasped her hands, 'let there be no more sorrow for my poor, dear friend ; make her happy once again.'

That fir-clad hill became Lucy's favourite resort by day, as it had been her brother's in the past, by night ; and she went again and again, till one afternoon, fol-

lowing out an old habit, she was stooping to pick a plant from where it grew, when she became aware of someone approaching, and she started and coloured, and then recovered herself, and rose erect and slightly resentful, for Major Day, looking very sad and old stood before her, raising his hat.

‘May I see what you have there?’ he said gravely.

‘I think it is an *Amanita*,’ said Lucy, trying hard to speak firmly, as she held out the whitish-looking fungus toward the old botanist, as if it had been a tiny Japanese parasol.

Major Day fixed his *pince-nez* on the organ it was made to pinch, and, taking the curious vegetable, carefully examined it, turning it over and over before saying decisively,—

‘Yes, exactly; *Amanita Vernus*, a very poisonous species, Miss Alleyne. I—er—I am very glad to see that you keep up your knowledge of this interesting branch of botany. I have been paying a good deal of attention to it in Italy this past autumn and winter.’

‘Indeed,’ said Lucy.

‘Yes, my dear—Miss Alleyne,’ said the major, correcting himself. ‘The Italians are great eaters of fungi. My brother found Rome and Florence very dull. Of course he was longing to be back amongst his farming stock. Great student of the improvement of cattle, Miss Alleyne. I found the country about Rome and Florence most interesting. It would have been far more so if I had had a sympathetic companion.’

‘I must—I will tell him everything,’ thought Lucy; and then the colour came, and she felt that it would be impossible, and that her only course was to allow time to smooth away this little burr.

‘Are you finding truffles?’ she said, with assumed cheerfulness.

He looked at her in a curiously wistful manner for a few moments, and that look was agony to Lucy, as her conscience told her that she had had a fall from the high niche to which she had risen in the major’s estimation.

‘Yes,’ he said, slowly, and there was an unwonted coldness and gravity in his manner; ‘at my old pursuit, Miss Alleyne—at my old pursuit. So you have not quite given it up?’

‘Oh no,’ cried Lucy, trying to pass over the coldness, which chilled her warm young heart. ‘I have been collecting several times lately, and—’

Lucy stopped short, for the major was looking at her keenly, as if recalling the fact that when she had been mushrooming she had encountered Rolph sauntering about with a cigar in his mouth.

‘Yes,’ said the major, quietly; ‘and were you very successful?’

It was a very simple question, just such a one as anyone might ask to help a hesitating speaker who had come to a standstill; but to Lucy it seemed so different from what she had been accustomed to hear from the major’s lips. His manner had always been

tenderly paternal towards her ; there had been such openness and full confidence between them, and such a warm pressure of hand to hand. Now this was gone, and there was a cold and dreary gap.

‘ Successful ? ’ said Lucy, with her voice trembling and her face beginning to work. ‘ Yes—no—I— Have you many truffles, Major Day ? ’

This last with an effort to master her emotion, and its effect, as she spoke sharply and quickly, was to give her time to recover herself, and the major a respite from what had threatened to be a painful scene.

‘ Yes, yes ; a fair number,’ he said, as if he were addressing one who was a comparative stranger, but towards whom he wished to behave with the greatest deference. ‘ They are very small, though—very small ; not like those they dig in France. May I send you a few, my—Miss Alleyne ? ’

Lucy shook her head, for her emotion mastered her this time. That alteration from what was to have been ‘ my dear ’ to ‘ Miss Alleyne ’ was too much for her, and she bowed hastily and hurried away.

But the major hastened after her, and overtook her in the lane.

‘ Miss Alleyne—Lucy,’ he cried. ‘ One moment, please.’

‘ Major Day ! ’ she cried, in surprise.

‘ And your very good old friend, my dear. Since I saw you last I have been thinking a great deal, and many things which troubled me before we left home

have gradually assumed an entirely fresh aspect. I was hasty, and, to be frank, I used to think ill of you, and my conscience is so full of reproach that I—if you'll excuse me—I—I must beg your pardon.'

'Beg my pardon, Major Day?' said Lucy, and she turned red and white by turns as she began to tremble.

'Yes, my dear, and ask you to forgive me.'

'Forgive you, Major Day?'

'Yes, my dear, I fear I was too ready to believe you were weak and foolish, and did not give you credit for being what you are, and—there, there, my dear, I surrender at discretion, I leave it to your generosity to let me march off with colours flying.'

'Dear Major Day! I didn't deserve that you should think so ill of me,' sobbed Lucy passionately, and laying her hands in the old man's she made no resistance as he drew her towards him, and kissed her forehead, just when, according to his unlucky custom, Oldroyd came into sight.

At the moment when the major bent down and pressed his lips on little Lucy's white forehead, the pony's head was directed straight towards them; the next instant he had sprung round like a weather-cock, and his head was directed towards home, but only for a few moments, before it was dragged round again, and the doctor came slowly ambling towards them, looking indignant and fierce.

'Then we are to be the best of friends again, eh, my dear, and I am quite forgiven?'

‘Oh, yes, dear Major Day,’ said Lucy; ‘but please don’t think so ill of me again.’

‘I’m a dreadful old scoundrel ever to have thought ill of you at all,’ cried the major. ‘There, we must forget all the past. Ah, doctor, how are you? When are you coming up to the hall? My brother will be glad to see you, I’m sure.’

‘I hope Sir John is not unwell?’ said Oldroyd, trying to wither Lucy with a look, and bringing back upon himself such an indignant flash that he metaphorically curled up, as he muttered something to himself about the daring impudence some women could display.

‘Unwell? dear me, no,’ said the major. ‘A little pulled down by too much inaction abroad; nothing hurts him though much. I mean come as a visitor. How is the health of the neighbourhood, eh?’

‘Excellent, Major Day, that is, excepting Mr Alleyne’s.’

‘What! Mr Alleyne ill? Bless my soul! you did not say anything about it, my dear.’

‘My dear! my dear!’ muttered Oldroyd between his teeth; ‘always my dear. Surely the old idiot is not going to marry the wicked little flirt.’

‘I had not had time, Major Day,’ said Lucy eagerly, ‘but I don’t think dear Moray is any worse than usual.’

‘Worse than usual? Then he has been unwell?’

‘He is ill,’ replied Lucy, ‘but it has been coming on

so slowly that I am afraid we do not notice it so much as we should.'

'But is he confined to his bed?'

'Oh, no!' cried Lucy. 'He is going on with his studies just as usual.'

'I'll come over and see him. I meant to come, but I—er—I hesitated, my dear. Do you think he would be pleased if I called?'

'I'm sure he would, Major Day,' cried Lucy. 'Pray come soon.'

'Indeed, I will, perhaps to-morrow. Are you going my way?'

'No, major, I am going back to The Firs. I do not like to be away when Mr Oldroyd is going to see my brother.'

The major shook hands warmly, and went his way, saying to himself,—

'What did she mean? She did not like to be away when Mr Oldroyd visited her brother? What she said, of course. Ah, how prone men are to put a second meaning to other people's words. How ready I was to think ill of the little lassie and her brother; and I am as ready now to own that she is innocence itself. I used to think, though, that she cared for Oldroyd.'

Meanwhile, Lucy was walking straight along by the side of the road, back towards The Firs, with Oldroyd, on his disreputable-looking steed, a yard or two upon her left.

By quitting the road and cutting across the open

boggy land, amidst the furze and whortleberry scrub Lucy could have saved a quarter-of-a-mile, and left her companion behind ; or even if he had elected to follow her, the softness of the soil and the constant recurrence of swampy patches about, which one on foot could easily avoid, would have necessitated so much care that he would have been left far behind.

But Lucy trudged steadily on with her pretty little face trying to look stern and hard, but failing dis——no, not dismally, for hers was a type of countenance from which the prettiness could not be eliminated try how one would.

Oldroyd was angry—bitterly angry. But he was in love. Once more jealous fear had attacked him. For had not he plainly seen Lucy's face held up in the most matter-of-fact manner for the major to bend down and kiss? Certainly he was an old man, old enough to be her grandfather, and the kiss had been given when he who witnessed it was two or three hundred yards away ; but there was the fact and Oldroyd felt furious.

All this time had passed since he had felt that he was growing very fond of Lucy, and his affection had been nipped and blackened like the top of a spring potato, by an unkindly frost, consequent upon the Rolph affair, while still like the spring potato, though the first shoots had been nipped, it was only for more and stronger ones to form and grow faster and faster than before. But Lucy had made no sign.

And so they went on towards The Firs on that delicious spring day, when the larks were singing overhead, the young growth of the pines shed a sweet odour of lemon to be wafted across the road, and at every step, Lucy's little feet crushed down a daisy, but the bright-eyed flower lifted its head again as soon as she had passed and did not seem to be trampled in the least. Oldroyd did as Lucy did—stared straight before him, letting the reins—a much mended pair—rest on the pony's neck; while Peter hung his head in a sleepy, contemplative way, and sometimes walked, sometimes slowly ambled on, as if moved by his spirit to keep abreast of Lucy.

Oldroyd's brow knit closely as he mentally wrote out a prescription to meet his new case, and then mentally tore it up again, ending by at last turning quite fiercely towards Lucy, giving the pony's ribs a couple of kicks as he snatched up the reins to force it forward, and then, as she started half frightened by his near approach, he said to her in a reproachful voice,—

‘How can you behave so cruelly to me, Lucy?’

According to all canons the rule in such a case was for Lucy to start, open her eyes a little more widely, stare, and say,—

‘Mr Oldroyd, I don't know what you mean!’

But this was out on a common, and not in a west-end drawing-room. Her heart was full, and she was not disposed just then to fence and screen herself

with maidenly conventionalities. She knew well enough that Philip Oldroyd loved her very dearly, almost as dearly, she owned in her heart of hearts, as she loved him, and that he was alluding broadly to her conduct with Rolph, her long display of resentment, and also to her having given the major a kiss that day. He was very angry and jealous, but that did not annoy her in the least. It gave her pleasure. He spoke very sharply to her just then—viciously and bitterly ; but she did not mind that either. It was piquant. It gave her a pleasant little thrill. There was a masterly sound about it, and she felt as if it was pleasant to be mastered just then, when she was in the most wilful and angry of moods.

‘You know what I mean,’ he said, quickly, ‘you know how I love you.’

‘Oh!’ said Lucy to herself very softly ; but though every nerve tingled with pleasure, not a muscle stirred, and she kept her face averted.

‘You know,’ continued Oldroyd, ‘how long I have loved you ; but you take delight in trampling upon my best feelings. I suppose,’ he added bitterly, ‘it is because I am so poor.’

‘Indeed it is not!’ cried Lucy with spirit, as she kept her back to him ; ‘how can you think me so pitiful and mean!’

‘Well, then, why do you treat me so badly?’

‘I don’t treat you badly.’

This was very commonplace, and Lucy’s con-

tinuous stare straight before her did not give it dignity.

‘You do treat me badly — cruelly — worse,’ exclaimed Oldroyd, kicking his pony’s ribs so viciously, that the poor brute resented it by shaking his head, and wagging his tail.

‘You have treated me shamefully, Mr Oldroyd,’ cried Lucy.

It was getting terribly commonplace now.

‘Indeed I have not,’ he replied. ‘How could I help feeling hurt when I saw you as I did with that horse-jockey foot-racing animal?’

‘You might have known that I had a reason for it, and that I was behaving so on behalf of my friend,’ said Lucy.

‘How was I to be able to analyse the secrets of your heart?’ said Oldroyd, romantically.

‘Then you looked insultingly at me just now, when dear old grandfatherly Major Day spoke to me, and behaved to me as he did. Why—oh, I haven’t patience with myself for speaking about it all as I do. It is degrading and weak; and what right, sir,’ she panted, ‘have you to ask me for such explanations?’

‘I do it in all humbleness, Lucy,’ he whispered, with his voice softening. ‘I have nothing to say in my defence, only that I love you so dearly that it cuts me to the heart to think that—that—oh, my darling, look at me like that again.’

It was all in a moment. Lucy's eyes had ceased to flash, and had darted out such a confession of forgiveness, and love, and tenderness, all mingled, as made Oldroyd forget all about the laws of equitation, and fall off his pony on the wrong side, to catch Lucy's hand in his and draw it tightly through his arm.

Peter began to nibble placidly at shoots, and everything was more commonplace than ever, for they walked slowly along by the roadside, with their heads down, perfectly silent ; while the pony browsed along, with his head down, and the rein dragging on the ground, till after a bit he trod upon it, gave his head a snatch at the check, and broke it, making it very little worse than it was before.

And so they went on, with the larks singing overhead, the grass and daisies springing beneath their feet, and the world looking more beautiful than it ever did before ; what time Glynne was sitting, pale, large-eyed, and thin, in her own room, reading hard—some heavy work, which she jealously placed aside whenever she had finished perusing ; and Moray Alleyne was alone in his observatory, gaunt, grey, and strange, busy over the calculations respecting the star he had been watching for nights past, that bright particular star that seemed somehow connected with the woman he had ventured to love.

‘Are you very angry, Mrs Alleyne?’ said Oldroyd,

as he took Lucy's hand in his and walked with her to where the mistress of The Firs was seated, busily stitching, in the very perfection of neatness, the pleats of a new garment for her son.

'Angry?' said Mrs Alleyne, starting and flushing, and then turning pale as she dropped her work, and her hands began to tremble. 'Does this mean—does this mean—?'

'That we love each other?' replied Oldroyd, glancing sidewise at Lucy. 'Yes, madam, it does, and I feel dread and shame, I scarcely know what, when I speak to you like this, for I am so poor, and my prospects so extremely wanting in brightness.'

'We are used to being poor, Mr Oldroyd,' said Mrs Alleyne, sadly.

'Then you do not object?'

'Why should I?' said Mrs Alleyne. 'It is natural that my child should some day form an attachment. She has, I presume, done so?'

'Oh, yes, yes, yes, mamma,' cried Lucy 'a long time now.'

'Then, knowing as I do, that the attachment is to a man of sterling worth,' said Mrs Alleyne softly, as she held out her hand, 'what more could I wish?'

Oldroyd caught the hand in his and kissed it, hesitated a moment, and then bent down and kissed Mrs Alleyne's thin pinched lips.

'It has given me the stimulus I wanted,' he said,

proudly. 'Mrs Alleyne, Lucy shall not be a poor man's wife, but— Ah, Alleyne.'

'Ah, Oldroyd,' said the astronomer, in his soft, deep voice, and he smiled sadly; 'come to prescribe for me again. And I'm better than ever now—but—is anything wrong?'

For the positions of the three occupants of the room he had entered struck him as being singular.

'Yes,' cried Oldroyd, 'very wrong. I, being a poor surgeon and general practitioner, have been asking your mother's consent to Lucy's becoming my wife.'

'And Lucy?' said Alleyne softly.

'Oh, yes, Moray, dear Moray,' she cried, hiding her face in his breast.

'I am very glad, Oldroyd,' said Alleyne, quietly. 'I have thought of it sometimes, and wondered whether it would come to this, and—and I am very very glad.'

He held out his hand and grasped the young doctor's very warmly, before kissing his sister, after which she escaped to her room, where she stayed for quite an hour before coming down shyly, and with a very happy look in her eyes.

Oldroyd was not gone. It was not likely. He had been staying with Alleyne in the observatory—watching his case as he told himself, but not succeeding in his self-deceit, and some kind of natural attraction led him back into the dining-room just as Lucy entered from the other door.

It must have been a further charge of natural attraction that led them straight into each other's arms, for the first long embrace and kiss, from which Lucy started back at last, all shame-faced, rosy-red, and with the sensation that she had just been guilty of something very wicked indeed.

‘Are you happy, Lucy?’ said Oldroyd.

‘No,’ she said, looking at him earnestly, ‘and I shall not be till others are happy too.’

CHAPTER XIII.

AS THROUGH A GLASS.

‘ LOVE rules the court, the camp, the grove,’ says the poet ; and there he stops, leaving the rest of the places under the pink little god’s *régime* to our imagination.

He was busy as ever at Brackley, with people in a humbler walk in life and there was an attraction there for a person who plays no prominent part in this narrative, to wit, Thompson, private dragoon in Her Majesty’s service, and valet and confidential man to Captain Rolph.

He had long fixed his affections possibly in military temporary fashion upon Mason, Glynne’s maid. These affections had glowed during the many visits to Warren and Hall, cooled down during the activities of service—rubbing down his master as he would a horse, and helping him to train—sinking for a year and a half or so after ‘ the upset ’ at Brackley, and turning up again when the captain came back to The Warren to be hitched on again, as he termed it. For, truth to tell, it was known that Mason had one hundred and fourteen pounds deposited in consols with a certain old lady in Threadneedle Street.

Thompson felt glad then, when one day the captain said to him,—

‘All packed up, isn’t it?’ and he replied that the luggage was ready. Whereupon the captain told him that he would not want him for a month.

‘And, by the way, go down to The Warren before my mother returns, and get my guns, a few books in my room, and the knick-knacks and clothes, and the rest.’

‘Don’t you want ’em, sir, next time you’re going down?’

‘Mind your own business, fool, and get the things.’

Thompson stood at attention, winked to himself, and thought of how near he would be to Brackley, and how, in spite of the past he would be sure of a welcome in the servants’ hall. A month would be long enough to ‘pull that off;’ and though he did not put it in words, to pull Mason’s savings out of the great British bank.

But then there was Sinkins, the village carpenter and parish clerk, who often did jobs at the Hall, a man with whom he had come in contact more than a year before, over the preparations for Glynne’s wedding, and had seen talking to Mason more than once, and whom he held in utter contempt.

It is of no use to disguise the truth, for no matter whether Matthew Sinkins was in his Sunday best, or in his regular carpenter’s fustian, he always exhaled a peculiar odour of glue. Certainly it was often dashed

with sawdust, suggestive of cellars and wine, or the fragrant resinous scent of newly cut satin shavings; but the glue overbore the rest, and maintained itself so persistently that, even during the week when Sinkins had the French polishing job at Brackley, and the naphtha and shell-lac clung to his clothes, there, making itself perceptible, was the regular good old carpenter's shop smell of glue.

Thompson said to Mason that it was disgusting, but she told him frankly that it was a good, clean, wholesome smell, and far preferable to that of the stables.

This, with toss of the head soon after Thompson's arrival, for, in spite of bygones he found on getting himself driven over from The Warren, quite a warm welcome from old friends, one and all being eager to talk over the past and learn everything that could be pumped out of Thompson respecting his master's doings since that terrible night.

Thompson was in the stable-yard smoking a cigar—a very excellent cigar, that had cost somewhere about a shilling—rather an extravagance for a young man in his position of life, but as it was one out of his master's box, the expense did not fall upon him; and had any one suggested that it was not honest for him to smoke the captain's cigars he would have looked at him with astonishment, and asked whether he knew the meaning of the word perquisites.

It was a very excellent cigar, and being so it might

have been supposed to have a soothing effect ; but whatever may have been its sedative qualities they were not apparent, for Thompson's face was gloomy, consequent upon his having seen Matthew Sinkins go up to the side door with his basket of tools hanging from his shoulder, and kept in that position by the hammer being thrust through one of the handles, that handle being passed through its fellow.

‘Him here, again?’ exclaimed Thompson. ‘He’s always hanging about the place. Well, it’s as free for me as for him, I suppose. I shall go and see.’

Thompson who was a smart, dapper-looking swarthy man, with closely cut hair, very small mutton chop whiskers, and dark beady eyes, threw away the half-smoked cigar, gave a touch to his carefully-tied white cravat, glanced down at his brightly polished boots, and let his eyes rest upon his very closely fitting Bedford cord trousers before crossing the yard, whistling in a nonchalant manner, and walking into the servants’ hall, where Matthew Sinkins was waiting with his tool basket on the floor by his side.

‘Hallo, chips!’ said Thompson, condescendingly, ‘how’s trade?’

‘Pretty tidy, Mr Thompson,’ said the carpenter, slowly, and taking out the two-foot rule which dwelt in a long narrow pocket down one leg of his trousers, but sheathing it again directly, as if it were a weapon which he did not at present need.

‘Glad of it,’ said Thompson. ‘Haven’t they asked you to have a horn of ale?’

‘Yes, Mr Thompson; oh, yes. Miss Mason has gone to get one for me from Mr Morris.’

‘Oh! has she?’ said Thompson; and this news was of so discomfoting a nature that he was taken a little aback. ‘Job on?’

‘Yes, Mr Thompson, I’m wanted. You’re here again, then. Thought you was going abroad.’

‘No,’ said Thompson, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and see-sawing himself to and fro, from toe to heel and back. ‘No, we’re not gone yet, Mr Sinkins; and if it’s any pleasure to you to know it, I don’t see any likelihood of our going for some time to come. What have you got to say to that?’

Mr Sinkin’s big hand went deliberately down the leg of his trousers, and he half drew out the rule again, as if he meant to measure the captain’s attendant, but he allowed the narrow strip of box-wood to glide back into its place and breathed hard.

‘I say, what have you got to say to that, Mr Sinkins?’ said Thompson, nodding his head a good deal, and unconsciously making himself wonderfully like a pugnacious bantam cock ruffling himself in the presence of a heavy, stolid, barn-door fowl.

‘Got to say to it?’ replied Sinkins, calmly.

‘Yes, sir, got to say to it, sir,’ cried Thompson, with an irritating air of superiority that appeared to

suggest that he had got the carpenter in a corner now, from which he did not mean to let him escape until he had answered the question put to him so sharply.

Sinkins seemed to feel that his rule was necessary once again, but the boxwood was allowed to slip back as its master shook his head, and said in a slow serious way,—

‘I haven’t got anything to say to it, Mr Thompson, sir.’

‘Oh, you haven’t.’

‘No, sir,’ replied the carpenter stolidly. ‘If I was to say a lot to it, I don’t see as it would make any difference one way or the other.’

‘No, sir,’ I should think it wouldn’t,’ cried Thompson; and just then Miss Mason, the brisk-looking, dark-eyed, ale-bearing Hebe of two-and-twenty, came in, looking as if she were wearing an altered silk dress that had once been the property of Glynne Day.

‘Oh, you are here, Mr Thompson, are you?’ she said with a voice full of acidity.

‘Yes, ma’am, I am here,’ said Thompson, sharply.

‘Perhaps you’ll come up as soon as you’ve drunk your ale, Mr Sinkins,’ said Miss Mason, sweetly. ‘I’ll show you which room.’

Matthew placed the horn at his lips, and removed it so reluctantly that it ceased to be a horn of plenty, and he set it back upon the table with a sigh. He

stooped then and took the handle of his hammer, lifting the tool basket, so that chisels and screws, and drivers, gimlets, saws, and planes, all jumbled up together, as they were swung round upon the strong man's shoulder, but only to be swung off again and carried in the hand, as being more suitable in so grand a place as Brackley Hall.

'Are you quite ready, Mr Sinkins,' said Miss Mason, in a tone of voice that seemed quite affectionate.

'Yes, miss, I'm quite ready.'

'Come along, then, Mr Sinkins,' said Mason; and with what was meant for a haughty look at the captain's man, she led the way through the door opening on to the back staircase, sending the said door back with unnecessary violence as Mr Thompson essayed to follow, but only essayed for fear of being ordered back.

'There's something up,' he said. 'That fellow's seen something about master, and been tale-bearing. And so he's to go up there all alone, easing and repairing doors as the old major's 'most banged off the hinges in his passions, and she's to stand by a-giving of him instructions, and all to aggravate and annoy me.'

He took a turn up and down the hall, screwing his doubled-up fist in his left hand, and grinding his teeth with rage.

'Yes; that's what it's for, just to aggravate and

annoy me, and him smelling that awful of glue ! Bah ! It's disgusting. A low, common, heavy-looking country bumpkin of a carpenter, as has never been hardly outside his village, and can only just sign his name with a square pencil, pointed up with a chisel. I say it's disgusting.'

Thompson took another turn or two up and down the hall, to ease his wounded pride, and then went on again talking to himself till he caught sight of the empty, unoffending horn, which he smote with his doubled fist, striking out at it scientifically from the shoulder, and sent it flying to the other end of the hall.

'Here, what I want to know,' said Thompson, is this—'Am I going to pull this here off, or am I not?'

There was no answer to the question, so the man sat down astride of a form, as if it had been a horse, folded his arms exceedingly tight, and scowled at the door that had been shut against him, devoured by jealousy, and picturing in his mind other matters beside the easing of doors and tightening of hinges, for he was measuring other people's conduct, not by Mr Sinkins' footrule, but by his own bushel.

'I can't stand it,' he muttered at last. 'I must have a quiet pipe.'

Striding out of the hall as if he were on duty, he marched right out across the park and into the lane, from whence he struck into the first opening in the fir woods where the shade seemed to calm him ; and,

taking out a pipe-case, he extracted a very black *bruyère* root pipe, filled it, stuck it in his mouth, and then, seeking for a match in his vest pocket, he lit it deftly by giving it a rub on the leg of his trousers, puffed his tobacco into incandescence, and then threw the glowing vesta, like a hand grenade, over his left shoulder.

There was a sharp ejaculation, and then,—

‘Confound your insolence, fellow!’

Thompson started round, and found himself facing the major, trowel in one hand, malacca cane in the other.

‘That light hit me in the face, sir. Do you know, sir, that you may set the woods on fire, sir?’ cried the major. ‘What! Thompson! ’Tention! What the devil are you doing here?’

The man gave a sharp look to left and right, and then, from old habit, obeyed the imperious military order, and drew himself upright, staring straight before him—‘eyes front.’

‘You scoundrel!’ cried the major, seizing him by the collar, and holding his cane threateningly, as the idea of some peril to his niece flashed across his mind. ‘You’ve brought a note or some message to the Hall.’

‘No, sir! really, sir, I haven’t, sir.’

‘Don’t dare to lie to me, you dog!’ cried the major, with the stick moving up and down, and Thompson’s eyes following it, in the full belief that at any moment it might fall upon his shoulders.

‘It’s gospel truth, sir,’ he cried. ‘I haven’t got no note. How could I have?’

‘Where’s your master?’

‘Off, sir.’

‘Off? What do you mean? Isn’t he at The Warren?’

‘No, sir; he only sent me down to fetch his things.’

‘Ah!’ cried the major; ‘and here with some message.’

‘No, sir, that he didn’t, sir. I come over here of my own self.’

‘What do you mean by “off”?’ cried the major. ‘You don’t go from here till you confess the truth. After what happened how dare you set foot on these grounds! I say, where is your master?’

‘Gone abroad, sir.’

‘Is that the truth?—Here, I was a bit hasty.—A sovereign, my lad.—Now, then, tell me. Your master sent you down here?’

‘Only to The Warren, sir, to fetch his things, because he wasn’t coming down again.’

The major looked at him searchingly.

‘Let me see,’ he said, sharply; ‘he was to be married the other day, wasn’t he?’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Thompson, with a peculiar look as he held the sovereign in his pocket, and ran a finger nail round the milled edge.

‘What do you mean by that, sir?’ cried the major

suspiciously, and the stick was raised again. 'Wasn't he married?'

'Well, he may have been since, sir, but that other didn't come off.'

'What?'

'Well, sir, the fact is, master was going to be, but there was a little trouble, sir, about another lady who lived in these parts, and when it come out about the wedding as was to be very quiet in London, there was a bit of a fuss.'

'Humph! well, that is nothing to me, my man. I made a mistake, and I ask your pardon.'

'It's all right, sir, and thank you kindly,' said Thompson. 'It was Ben Hayle's daughter, sir, Miss Judith, who used to be at The Warren before they were sent away.'

The major had turned his back to go, but the man's words arrested him, and, in spite of himself, he listened.

'Ben Hayle come to Long's, sir, in Bond Street, where we was staying, and got to see master. I was packing up, because master was going on the Continong next day, and there was a tremenjus row, all in whispers like, because I was in the next room, but Ben Hayle got louder and louder, and I couldn't help hearing all the last of it.'

'There, that will do. I don't want to hear any more.'

'No, sir, certainly not,' said Thompson; 'but

master didn't go to the church with Miss Emlin, sir, and from what I heered he went abroad next night, sir.'

'Alone?'

'No, sir,' said Thompson, smiling.

'Poor Glynne!' muttered the major as he turned away. 'The man is a disgrace to the service. An utter scoundrel. Gone abroad. No, he would not go alone.'

Thompson, left in the wood, took out and looked at the sovereign, and concluded that he would not go to the Hall again.

CHAPTER XIV.

FAR SEEING.

‘POOR old soul, she can’t be long for this world,’ said Oldroyd one day on receiving a message from Lindham, and, mounting Peter, he rode over across the commons to the old cottage.

‘Oh, you’ve come at last, then,’ said the old woman, raising herself in bed and frowning heavily. ‘There, don’t you go telling me no lies. I know where you’ve been wasting the parish time as you’re paid for.’

‘Wasting the time?’ said Oldroyd, laughing.

‘Ah, it’s nothing to make fun of. When I told you to take to Miss Lucy, I didn’t mean you to go courting for months, but to marry her and done with it, so as she might be a bit useful, visiting and nursing some o’ the sick folk on your rounds.’

‘Why, you dissatisfied old woman,’ cried Oldroyd merrily, ‘I rode over as soon as I got your message.’

‘Well, then, why don’t you do me some good at once, and not stand talking. If you knowed the aggynies I suffer, you wouldn’t stand talking. You heered the news?’

‘What, about the French?’

‘Tchut! What do I know about the French? I mean about my grandbairn.’

‘Miss Hayle? No.’

‘The captain took her off, and we thought he’d married her, you know, but he didn’t.’

‘Poor girl!’ said Oldroyd, sadly.

‘Bah! I haven’t patience with her. Got her head turned up at The Warren, being with that girl there; and then, in spite of all I said, and her father said, she must be always thinking of the captain, and breaking her heart when she heard he was going to marry first this one and then that. She got so that at last he had only to hold up his finger and say come, and away she went; and now she’s back in London, left to shift for herself, with lots of fine clothes. She’s writ home to her father for help. But we shall see—we shall see.’

‘A scoundrel!’ exclaimed Oldroyd.

‘Yes, he’s a bad un,’ said the old woman, ‘a reg’lar bad un, but he’ll get his deserts; you see if he don’t. Ben Hayle arn’t Sir John Day up at the Hall. He won’t let my gentleman off so easy; you see if he do. Ah, it’s a strange world, doctor, and I begin to think it gets worse and worse.’

Oldroyd listened to a good deal more of the old lady’s moralising about the state of the world, as he ministered to her ‘aggynies,’ and finally left, after undertaking to call again very soon.

‘Mind, you shut the door!’ shouted the old woman; ‘the haps don’t fit well. You must try it after you’ve let go.’

‘I’ll mind,’ said Oldroyd good-humouredly; and, mounting Peter, he was thoughtfully jogging homeward, when the pony stopped in front of a gate, on which a man was seated—the pony having apparently recognised an old patient, and paused for the doctor to have a chat.

‘Do, sir?’ said the man, getting down slowly and touching his hat.

‘Ah, Hayle, glad to see you looking so strong again.’

‘Ay, sir,’ said the man, smiling sadly; ‘you ought to be proud o’ me, and make a show of what you’ve done for me. ‘Bout your best job, warn’t I?’

‘Well, I suppose you were, in surgery,’ said Oldroyd, looking hard at the man’s pinched face and settled frown; ‘but, I say, my man, hadn’t you better drop that life now, and try something different?’

‘Easier said than done, doctor,’ replied Hayle grimly. ‘Give a dog a bad name and hang him. Nobody wouldn’t employ me. S’pose I said to you. “Change your life and turn parson.” Wouldn’t be easy, would it?’

Oldroyd shook his head.

‘Perhaps not,’ he said; ‘but you’re too good a man for a poacher. Look here, Hayle; Morton has left and gone to Lord Bogmere’s. Sir John Day is very

friendly to me. Let me go and state your case to him frankly.'

'Wouldn't be no good, sir.'

'Don't say that. He's a thorough English gentleman, always ready to do anyone a good turn. I believe in you, Hayle; and if I say to him that you would gladly come and serve him faithfully, I should say so believing honestly that you would. Shall I speak to him?'

'Thank you kindly, sir, but not now. I've got too much else on my mind,' said Hayle, gazing at the doctor searchingly. 'Been to see the old lady?'

'Yes.'

'Did—did she tell you any news?'

Oldroyd nodded.

'Ah, she would,' said the ex-keeper thoughtfully. 'Hah! he's a bad un; but I didn't think he'd be quite so bad as that to her; for she's a handsome gal, doctor—a handsome gal.'

'More's the pity,' thought Oldroyd, though he did not speak.

'It's well for him that I haven't run again him, I can tell you. Don't happen to know where the captain is, do you, sir?'

'No, I have not the least idea; and if I had, I don't think I should tell you.'

'S'pose not, doctor,' said the man, with a strange laugh, 'seeing what's coming off.'

'Why; what are you going to do?'

‘Do, sir,’ said Hayle slowly, as he leaned on the gate, and looked down the dark path in the wood. ‘When I was a young man, and made up my mind to trap a hare or a fezzan, or p'r'aps only a rabbud, I trapped it. P'r'aps I didn't the first time ; p'r'aps I didn't the second or third ; but I kept on at it till I did, and I'm going to trap him.’

‘What, Captain Rolph ! Make him pay for the injury to your daughter ?’

‘I'm going to see if he'll make it up to her first. If he won't, I'll make him pay.’

‘Make it up ! Do you mean marry her ?’

‘Yes ; that's what I mean, sir,’ said Hayle slowly, and then, turning round to face the doctor, and fix him with his big dark eyes. ‘He shall pay his debt if he don't marry her !’

‘Do you mean in money—breach of promise ?’

‘No,’ said the man, speaking to him fiercely. ‘No money wouldn't pay my gal nor me. He took a fancy to her, and she liked him, and I forgive him for his cunning way of following her when I was laid by. I forgive him, too, for what he did to me. It was fair fight so far, but it was his gun as shot me that night. I didn't bear no malice again him for all that, as long as he was square toward Judith ; but he's thrown her off, and I'm going to see him about it.’

‘Man, man, what are you going to do ?’ cried Oldroyd.

‘What am I going to do?’ roared Hayle, blazing up into sudden fury. ‘You’re going to marry sweet young Miss Lucy, yonder. S’pose eighteen or nineteen years, by-and-by, doctor, there’s another Miss Lucy as you’re very proud on. You’re genteel people, we’re not; but the stuff’s all the same. I was proud o’ my Judith, same as you’ll be proud of your Miss Lucy when she comes. What am I going to do? What would you do to the man as took her from you, and when his fancy was over sent her off?’

Oldroyd stood gazing at the fierce face before him.

‘Doctor, when I heerd first as he’d thrown her over, I said to myself, “He’s a proud chap—proud of his strong body, and his running and racing: he shall know what it is to suffer now. Curse him, I’ll break him across my knee.” Then I stopped and thought, doctor, and made up my mind that he should marry her, and if he don’t—’

Hayle stopped short, with his lips tightened and his fists clenched; and then, in a curiously furtive way, he turned his face aside, sprang lightly over the gate into the wood, and disappeared from the doctor’s sight.

‘If I had done that fellow a deadly wrong I should not feel very happy and comfortable in my own mind,’ said Oldroyd, as he looked in the direction in which the man had disappeared. ‘Ah, well, it’s no business of mine; and, thank goodness, I lead too

busy a life to have many of the temptations talked of by good old Doctor Watts.'

'Now, then, I've taken my physic,' he added, after a few minutes' thought, and with a cheery smile on his countenance, 'so I'll go and have my sugar. Go on, Peter.'

Peter went on, and, as if knowing where to go, took the doctor straight to The Firs.

CHAPTER XV.

THE IMAGE FADES.

‘OH, how you startled me.’

‘Can’t help being ugly,’ said Oldroyd merrily. ‘Eliza said you had come in, and were down the garden, so I took the liberty of following.’

‘Does mamma know?’ said Lucy, with a guilty look at the house.

‘I really can’t tell,’ said Oldroyd, smiling. ‘I shall not look for her permission now, since I consider myself your duly qualified medical attendant, your life physician, I hope.’

‘Really, Mr Oldroyd,’ said Lucy, ‘you need not feel my pulse to-day.’

‘Indeed, but I must,’ he said ; ‘and look into your eyes to see if they are clear.’

‘What nonsense!’ said Lucy. ‘I suppose next you’ll want me to put out my tongue.’

‘No,’ he said laughing, ‘your lips will do.’

‘Philip! For shame! Anyone might have seen. You shouldn’t.’

‘Save that I would not have anyone witness of so holy a joy as that kiss was to me,’ whispered Oldroyd,

‘the whole world might see my love for you, little wife to be. There’s no shame in it, Lucy. I am so happy. And you?’

‘I’m very, very miserable,’ she cried, looking in his face with eyes that denied the fact.

‘Then you are to tell me your trouble,’ he whispered, fondly, ‘and I am to console you.’

‘But I don’t think you can, Philip.’

‘Well, let us hear,’ he said. ‘What is the trouble?’

‘It is about poor Moray.’

‘Ah! Yes!’ said Oldroyd slowly.

‘And Glynne!’

‘Whom you have just been to see, eh?’

‘Yes.’

‘I once knew a case,’ said Oldroyd, ‘where two people were most tenderly attached to each other—the gentleman far more so than the lady; but they, loving as they did, were kept apart by foolish doubts and misconceptions and pride.’

‘It is not true,’ said Lucy sharply.

‘That they were kept apart like that?’

‘No; that—that—’

‘The gentleman was more deeply touched than the lady? No; that part is not true. It was just the reverse.’

‘And that is not true either,’ said Lucy archly.

‘Well, we’ll not argue the point,’ said Oldroyd, laughing. ‘But I’ll go on. In their case no one interfered to set matters straight, and they only came right

through the tender affection and good heart of the dearest little girl who ever lived.'

'You may say that again, Philip,' said Lucy, nestling to him, and looking up through a veil of tears; 'but it isn't a bit true. I'm afraid I was very, very weak, and proud and foolish, and I feel now as if I could never forgive myself for much that I have done.'

'I'll forgive you, and you shall forgive me,' said Oldroyd. 'And now I don't think I need go on speaking in parables. I only wanted to point out the difference. Our trouble arranged itself without the help of friends. That of someone else ought soon to be set right, with two such energetic people as ourselves to help.'

'But sometimes interference makes matters worse,' sighed Lucy.

'Yes; because those who see about these matters are ignorant pretenders. Now, we are both duly qualified practitioners, Lucy, and, I think, can settle the matter right off, and cure them both.'

'But how? It is so dreadful.'

'Lucy, Lucy!'

It was a sharp, agonised call, as of one in extreme anguish, and, startled by the cry, Lucy sprang up and ran towards the house, closely followed by Oldroyd.

'Mamma, dear mamma, what is it?' she cried.

'Your brother. Oh, thank heaven, Mr Oldroyd, you are here.'

'What is it?' cried Oldroyd, catching Mrs Alleyne's white and trembling hand.

‘I—I went—I ventured to go into the observatory just now, my son seemed so quiet, and—oh, heaven, what have I done that I should suffer this?’

It was a wild appeal, uttered by one in deep agony of spirit, as Mrs Alleyne reeled, and would have fallen, had not Oldroyd caught her in his arms, and gently lowered her on the carpet.

‘Only fainting,’ he whispered. ‘Let her lie; loosen her dress, and bathe her face. I’ll run on to your brother.’

Satisfied that he was not wanted there, and, giving Lucy an encouraging nod, Oldroyd ran quickly along the passage to the observatory, whose door he found open, but almost in total darkness, for the shutters were carefully closed, and the shaded lamp gave so little light, save in one place on the far side of the table, that he was compelled to cross the great room cautiously, for fear of falling over some one or other of the philosophical instruments, whose places the student often changed.

On reaching the table, he could see that Alleyne was lying prone upon the well-worn rug before his chair; and, making his way to the window, Oldroyd tore open the shutters, admitting a burst of sunshine, and completely changing the aspect of the great dusty place.

Going back to the table, he took in the position at a glance. There were bottles there, in a little rack such a chemist would use, and one stood alone.

He caught it up, removed the stopper, then put it down with an impatient 'Pish!' and was turning to the prostrate man, when, previously hidden by a book, another stopper caught his eye, and, drawing in his breath with a loud hiss, he sprang to Alleyne's side, to find that the fingers of his right hand tightly clasped a small cut-glass bottle, the one to which the stopper belonged.

'I was afraid so,' muttered Oldroyd, with his eyes scanning the white, fixed countenance before him. 'He must have taken it as he stood by the table, and fallen at once. Poor fellow! Poor fellow! He must have been mad.'

These words were uttered as, with all the prompt decision of a medical man, Oldroyd was examining his friend; his first act being to ascertain what the little bottle had contained.

'It was no easy task to free it from the stiffened fingers; but he tore it away at last, held it to the light, to his nostrils, and then set it quickly upon the table, with an impatient exclamation.

'And I call myself a practised doctor,' he muttered, and let my fancy carry me away as it did. Poor fellow! He must have felt it coming on, and tried that ammonia to keep off the sensation. Suffered from it before, perhaps,' he continued, as he laid Alleyne's head more easily, tore open his handkerchief and collar; and then, after drawing up the lids and examining the pupils of his eyes, he hurriedly

threw open both windows, and caught up a chart from a side table.

His next act was to ring the bell furiously, and then return to Alleyne's side and begin fanning his head vigorously.

It was Lucy who answered the bell, running in exclaiming,—

‘Oh, Philip, what is it, pray?’

‘Don't make a fuss, darling,’ he said, quickly. ‘Be a firm little woman. I want your help. Cold water, a big basin, sponge, brandy, vinegar. Quick?’

Lucy made an effort to compose herself, and the prompt order had its due effect, for she ran out, to return in a few minutes laden with all Oldroyd had demanded.

‘That's right,’ he said, quickly; and in answer to Lucy's inquiring eyes, ‘A fit, dear. He has overdone it. Exhaustion. Brain symptoms. Over pressure. That's well. Now, the brandy. Here, you take this card and keep on fanning, while I bathe his head with the spirit and water. We must cool his head. Fan away. Be calm now. A doctor's wife must not cry. That's brave.’

All the while he was applying the sponge, saturated with spirit and water, to Alleyne's temples, and checking Lucy when she seemed disposed to break down, the result being that she worked busily and well.

‘Well done, brave little woman,’ he cried, encouragingly. ‘It is a regular fit of exhaustion, and

we must not let it come to anything more. Give me the fan, dear. No, go on. I'll apply some more water. Evaporates quickly, you see, and relieves the brain. Spirit stimulates, even taken through the pores like that. Good heavens, what a mat of hair. Quick ! Scissors. I must get rid of some of this.'

He now took the extemporised fan from Lucy's fingers, using it energetically, while she rose from her knees, and ran to get a pair of her sharpest scissors, with which Oldroyd remorselessly sheared off the long unkempt locks from his patient's temples.

Meanwhile Alleyne lay there perfectly motionless, breathing heavily, and with a strange fixed look in his eyes. At times a slight spasm seemed to convulse him, but only to be succeeded by long intervals of rigidity, during which Lucy plied the fan, gazing at her brother with horror-stricken eyes, while Oldroyd continued the cold bathing in the most matter-of-fact manner.

'If we could get some ice,' muttered Oldroyd, as he laid a cool hand upon his patient's head ; and just then Mrs Alleyne, looking very white and weak, came into the room.

'I am better now,' she whispered. 'It was very foolish of me. What can I do ?'

'Nothing, at present,' replied Oldroyd. 'Yes ; send to the Hall. I know they have ice there. Ask Sir John Day to let us have some at once.'

Mrs Alleyne darted an agonised look at her son, and then glided out of the room, when Lucy looked up piteously at Oldroyd.

‘Pray, pray, tell me the truth,’ she whispered; ‘does this mean—death?’

‘Heaven forbid!’ he replied, quickly. ‘It is a bad fit, but a man may have several such as this and live to seventy. Lucy, we were looking about for a means to a certain—keep on fanning, my dear, that’s right—certain end.’

‘I don’t understand you,’ she said piteously.

‘Alleyne—Glynne—to bring them together. This is her work—thinking of her and over-toiling. Surely her place is here.’

Lucy heaved a sigh, but she held her peace, and busily wafted the cool air to her brother’s forehead.

Mrs Alleyne returned, to kneel down a short distance away, in obedience to a whisper from the doctor; and then an hour passed, and there was no change, while hope seemed to be slowly departing from poor Lucy’s eyes.

Suddenly a horse’s feet were heard coming at a gallop, and a minute or two later there was a tap at the door.

‘I came on at once,’ said Sir John, entering on tiptoe. ‘My brother is having the ice well opened, and he will be over directly with one of the men. Now, Mr Oldroyd, what can I do? I have the cob

outside. Shall I—don't be offended, you might like help—shall I gallop over and get Doctor Blunt.'

'It is not necessary,' said Oldroyd thoughtfully, 'but it would be more satisfactory to all parties. I should be glad if you could go, Sir John.'

'Yes; exactly. How is he?'

'There's no change, and not likely to be for some time,' replied Oldroyd, quietly.

Sir John looked pityingly at Alleyne, turned to Mrs Alleyne, took her hand and pressed it gently. Then, bending over Lucy, he took her hand in his.

'Keep a good heart, my dear,' he whispered. 'He'll be better soon;' and going out on tiptoe, it hardly seemed a minute before the regular beat of his horse's hoofs could be heard dying away in the distance.

A few minutes later the rumble of wheels was heard, and directly after Eliza came to the door with a pail of ice.

'And Major Day's in the dining-room, please, ma'am,' whispered the girl, in a broken voice; 'and is master better, and can he do anything?'

'Go and speak to him, Lucy. Here, your handkerchief first. That's right!' said Oldroyd sharply. 'Now, the smallest pieces of the ice. That's right. Go and say—No change. Perhaps he'll sit down and wait.'

As he spoke, with Mrs Alleyne's help, he was busily arranging the smaller fragments from the pail

of ice in a couple of handkerchiefs, and applying them to his patient's head.

'There,' he said, 'that's better than all our fanning. Now, I hope to see some difference.'

The change was long in coming, Alleyne remaining perfectly insensible for hour after hour. Towards evening the principal physician of the neighbourhood arrived, and was for some time with the sick man, returning afterwards to where Mrs Alleyne, Lucy, Sir John, and the major were, waiting impatiently for news.

He said he was not surprised at the seizure, upon learning the history of the case from his friend, Mr Oldroyd, upon whose treatment he could make no change whatever.

'Then you think the worst!' cried Mrs Alleyne piteously.

'Pardon me, my dear madam; not at all. There are cases that time alone can decide. The ailment has been growing for many months. Your son must have had premonitory warnings, attacks of faintness, and the like; for he had provided himself with a strong preparation of ammonia; but he has not been leading a life that would improve the general state of his health. Over-study and general mental anxiety have, no doubt, been the causes of this attack; and as it has taken months to reach this culmination, it will take a long time to bring him back to health.'

‘Then you think there is no danger?’ said Sir John eagerly.

‘I think there is great danger, Sir John ; but I hope that we shall be able to successfully ward it off.’

Oldroyd and Mrs Alleyne resumed their places by the patient, the observatory being turned into a sick chamber, and mattresses and bedding were brought down ; and there the astronomer lay, in the midst of the trophies of his study, his instruments and his piles of notes ; the great grim tubes pointing through the opened shutters at the far-off worlds, towards which it almost seemed as if—weary with the struggle to reach them while chained to earth—he was about to wing his flight.

Lucy came in on tiptoe to bend forward over her brother, but Oldroyd rose.

‘Go back, dear,’ he said, ‘and get some refreshment. It is time you dined.’

‘Dined !—at a time like this !’ she said reproachfully.

‘Yes ; at a time like this. It will be a case of long nights of watching. He must not be left, and we must have strength to attend him through it all. Leave it to me, dear, and do as I wish.’

Lucy bent down and kissed his hand in token of obedience, and soon after joined Sir John and the major in the dining-room.

‘Can I do anything else now?’ said Sir John ; ‘if

not, I'll go. I promised Glynne to go back with news as soon as there was any to carry. Are you coming, Jem ?'

'No,' said the major quietly. 'I'm going to stop and help, if it's only to see that Miss Lucy here has rest and food.'

CHAPTER XVI.

CELESTIAL MATTERS.

SIR JOHN nodded and went straight back to Brackley to find Glynne dressed and impatiently pacing the drawing-room, pale even to ghastliness, and with eyes dilated and looking large and wild.

‘How long you have been!’ she panted, catching his hand. ‘Tell me quickly—how is he? Tell me the worst.’

‘The worst is that he is very bad. It is a serious seizure, my dear, but the doctors give hope.’

‘Father, this long waiting has been more than I could bear, she cried hysterically. ‘I felt as if I should go mad. Now take me there—at once.’

‘Take you—to The Firs?’

‘Yes; now. The carriage is ready. I told them to have it waiting.’

‘But, Glynne—my darling, is it—is it quite right that you should go? Well, perhaps as Lucy’s friend.’

‘I am not going as Lucy’s friend, father,’ cried Glynne; ‘this is no time for paltry subterfuge. I am going to him who is stricken down. I must go; I cannot stay away.’

Sir John looked serious, but beyond knitting his brows, he said nothing, only rang for the carriage, and then hurried away to fortify himself with a tumbler of claret and some biscuits.

In a few minutes they were being rapidly driven to The Firs, Glynne remaining perfectly silent till they were near the gates, when she laid her hand upon her father's.

'Don't think me strange,' she said in a low voice. 'I feel as if I must go to him now. I may never hear his voice again.'

They were shown into the drawing-room, where, at Oldroyd's wish, Mrs Alleyne had been taken by Lucy to partake of some refreshment, and, as Glynne advanced into the dimly-lighted room, their neighbour rose from her seat and stood confronting her.

'Well?' she said bitterly; 'have you come to see your work?'

Glynne did not speak, but catching at Mrs Alleyne's hand, sank upon her knees, while Sir John drew back with Lucy.

'Why do you come here?' said Mrs Alleyne, after a pause, painful in its silence to all.

The door closed softly just then, and Glynne started and glanced round to see that she was alone with Mrs Alleyne. Then she uttered a low, weary cry.

'You do not know—you do not know how I have suffered, or you would not speak to me like this,' she whispered.

‘Suffered!’ retorted Mrs Alleyne, bitterly; ‘what have your sufferings been to his? Woman, you came upon this house like a curse, to play with his true, noble heart; and when you had, with your vile coquetry, won it, you tossed it from you with insult, leaving him to suffer patiently, till nature could bear no more; and now you have come to look upon the wreck you have made. But you were not to go unpunished. Do you hear me, woman—he, my brave, true son, is stricken to his death.’

‘No, no, no,’ cried Glynne, flinging her arms round Mrs Alleyne; ‘it is not true—he is not dying—he shall not die, for I love him; I love him with all my weary heart.’

‘You?’ cried Mrs Alleyne, striving to free herself from the frantic grasp that was about her.

‘Yes; I—even now,’ cried Glynne, rising and clinging to her firmly; ‘it is true that I loved him from the first. How could I help loving one so wise and true?’

‘And yet you trifled with him,’ cried Mrs Alleyne fiercely.

‘No; it was with my own heart,’ sobbed Glynne, ‘I did not know. What could I do? You know all. I seemed to wake at last standing upon the brink of an abyss;’ and then, ‘Mrs Alleyne, is there to be no pardon for such as I? Was my act such a crime in the sight of Heaven that the rest of my life was to be blasted, for he loved me—he loved me with all his heart.’

Mrs Alleyne shuddered and shrank away.

‘Are you, too, pitiless?’ cried Glynne. ‘You must know all—how he loved me, and loves me still. Has he told you all?’

‘Told me—all? What do you mean?’

‘Must I speak to you?’ whispered Glynne hoarsely, as she sank upon her knees and clung to Mrs Alleyne’s dress, ‘I would have given the world to go back upon my promise, for I knew how he loved me, but in my blindness I said it was too late.’

‘Yes; it was too late,’ said Mrs Alleyne coldly.

‘But you will let me see him. Let me go to him. I ask no more. Let me be at his side, for it may be that I can save his life. Then—send me away, and let me have but one thought—that I have given life to him I loved. Mrs Alleyne, have I not suffered enough? Have some pity on me. Have pity on your son.’

Mrs Alleyne caught her by the shoulder and drew her nearer, so that she could gaze into the thin, white face; and, as she studied its lines of care, her fierce look softened, and she caught Glynne tightly to her breast, sobbing over her wildly, and crying from time to time, ‘My child!—my poor child!’

Some time had passed before they went in softly, hand in hand, to where Oldroyd sat by his patient’s head.

The doctor did not look in the least surprised, but nodded his head as if it was exactly what he had ex-

pected, and, after bending down over Alleyne for a moment, he left the room.

And so it was, that when reason began to resume its seat in Moray Alleyne's mind, his eyes rested upon the pale, careworn face of Glynne. For she had stayed. There was no question of her leaving The Firs while the patient was in danger, and when the peril seemed past she still stayed, to glide large-eyed, pale and patient about the quiet chamber, Mrs Alleyne giving up to her, as her hand smoothed the pillow and lent support, when, feeble as an infant, Moray lay breathing the summer breeze which came perfumed through the pines.

It was when speech had returned that Glynne sat near him one evening, watching his white face with its grey silken hair, and the heavy beard which had been spared by the doctor when his patient was at the worst.

Neither had spoken for some time, but gazed, each with a strange yearning, in the other's eyes. For it had been coming for days, and instinctively they knew that it must come that night—the end, and with it a long farewell, perhaps only to meet again upon the further shore.

Glynne was the first to speak, and it was in a whisper.

‘Moray, when I knew that you were stricken down, I prayed that I might come to you, and struggle with the deadly shade to save your life.’

He looked at her with a wistful gaze, and his lips trembled as he closed his eyes.

‘My work is done now. Forgive me for coming. I cannot touch your hand again.’

‘No,’ he said sadly ; and his voice was so low and deep that she bent forward to hear his words, and lowered her face into her hands that she might not let him see the agony and despair working, as she bent to her unhappy fate.

For there had been some vague, undefined idea floating through her brain, that he might have said one gentle, sorrowing, pitying sentence before she went—he, the man whom she knew now to have loved her tenderly and well. But he had acquiesced so readily. That simple little ‘no’ had gone to her heart like a stiletto thrust. She, degraded as she was, could not take him by the hand again.

Then she started up to gaze at him wildly and reproachfully, for he repeated the negative, and added,—

‘Better, may be, dear, that I had died, as perhaps I shall before long. But, before you go, take with you the knowledge that I loved you dearly from the first. Ah, Glynne, what might have been !’

‘Yes, what might have been !’ she said sadly. ‘Better too that I had died, as I have often prayed that I might ; but I was mad to offer such a prayer, for my work in life was not at an end. I did not know then. I know now, and my task is done.’

He was silent then, and she rose to go.

‘Good-bye,’ she whispered. ‘We shall never meet again.’

She had glided to the door, and her hand was raised to the fastening, when he cried faintly,—

‘Stop!’

A low sigh escaped her lips.

Was he, then, going to speak one loving word to soften the bitterness of the last farewell? Her eyes brightened at the thought, and she turned and took a step or two towards him, with outstretched hands, which fell to her sides as she uttered a groan full of the despair at her heart.

‘No, no : don’t touch me,’ he cried wildly. ‘You—innocent and sinned against—cannot take me by the hand again. Listen, Glynne, I must tell you before you go. It will be our secret, dear, for the confession to another, and my punishment, would mean fresh suffering and agony to you.’

‘I—I do not understand you,’ she faltered, as she looked at him wildly.

‘No ; it has been my secret until now. Glynne, dear, in my mad despair, I had gone to watch your window from the fir-wood, as I had watched it scores of times before, and I said . “It is for the last time. To-morrow she belongs to him, and I will not degrade the idol of my love by thoughts that are not true.” I reached the place sacred to me for my sorrow, but that night I could not rest there. It was as if something impelled me, against which I

fought for hours before it mastered me, and as if by a strange magnetism—an evil planet attracted to a good—I was drawn nearer and nearer to the spot which contained all I held dear in life.’

A faint ejaculation, half wonder, half horror, escaped Glynne’s lips, and, with one quick movement she was close to his side, bending over him and gazing with wildly dilated eyes at the dimly-seen face upon the pillow, the faint smile upon his lips, as he referred to her in his astronomical simile, seeming almost repellent at such a time.

‘I felt guilty, dear,’ he went on, and she shivered while he turned his face a little toward the faint light of the window, and was silent for a few moments, while a fit of trembling came upon Glynne, and she had to catch at the bed and support herself.

‘I was not master of myself, dear. I loved you, and in my madness, weak from my bitter struggle with the power which led me on, I stole like some guilty wretch across the park till I reached the garden, and there I once more paused to renew the fight—to master the desire to be near you for the last time and then go back.’

‘Oh, Moray, Moray,’ she cried, with a piteous moan, and she sank upon her knees, uttering low, hysterical sobs.

‘My poor lost love!’ he whispered faintly; and his hand was laid feebly upon her bent head, which sank lower at his touch. ‘It was in vain. I can hardly

recall it dear, for I tell you I must have been mad, but I crept closer and closer till I was beneath your window, and could touch the long, rope-like stems that reached from where I stood praying for your happiness, and a wild and guilty joy thrilled me, for I touched the tendrils which clung around the chamber which held you, my love—my love !’

‘Moray !’ she cried wildly ; and in ecstasy of horror, wonder, and confused thought mingled, she clasped her arms about his neck, and buried her burning face in his breast.

‘Ah !’ he sighed ; and his trembling hands rose to press her head closer and closer to his fluttering heart.

A few moments only, and then she started from him.

‘No, no,’ she cried wildly, as she cast back the thought which, for a moment, she had gladly harboured. ‘Impossible ! It could not be.’

‘I speak the truth,’ he said gently. ‘I must tell you now—while there is time.

She clasped her hands, and her fingers seemed to grow into her flesh with the agonised pressure as she crouched there, trembling, by his bed, her lips apart, her throat dry, and her breath coming and going with a harsh laboured sound, while his came feebly, and his words were harder to hear in the darkness which now shrouded them.

‘Yes,’ he sighed ; ‘I must tell you before it is too late.’

He was silent for a moment or two, and then went on, with every word sending a pang of agony and shame through his listener's ears.

'Glynne, dearest, since that night I have often prayed that I might die, but death is long in coming to those who ask its help. I had raised my hand to steal one leaf from the creeper, when it fell to my side. Yes,' he said, with a hurried intensity now taking the place of his feeble whisper, 'I remember—I see all clearly now. I had raised my hand, but it fell to my side, and a pang of horror shot through me, for there was the noise of struggling overhead, faint, half-stifled cries, and then the baying of a dog. For a moment I was dazed, then I turned to run to the door and raise an alarm, when a cry rang out again, and, for the first time, I knew that it came from your window above my head.'

He stopped, panting heavily, and Glynne, trembling violently now, drew nearer and nearer to him, with the darkness closing in, and Alleyne's face dimly seen on the grey pillow.

'Listen,' he went on; 'it was dark—so dark that I could hardly see that your window was thrown wide; but it was as if a horrible scene were being flashed into my brain, as I ran back over the short grass to stand beneath and begin to climb up by the thick rope-like stems that ran above. Then, as I grasped them, they were shaken violently; a man who had climbed out slipped rapidly down, and I

seized him. But he was lithe and active, as I was slow, heavy, and unused to such an effort. He shook himself free, but I grasped him again, and once more he escaped me. But again I tried to seize him, and this time he struck at me, and I felt a sharp blade pass through my hand.

‘It gave him a few moments’ start, but not more; and as he ran, a madman was at his heels. Yes, a madman, for the passion within me was not that of one in the full possession of his senses.’

Alleyne paused for a few moments, and, as Glynne’s hands once more, tremblingly and with a pleading gesture, stole to his breast, his, cold and dank in their touch, slowly pressed them to his heart, and held them there.

‘Guilty,’ he murmured, ‘but for your sake, dearest, and there must be forgiveness. For my love was strong, and the maddening feeling within me burned, as in my rage I tore on after the dark shadow that was hurrying away.’

He was silent again for a few minutes, and once more Glynne’s head went down till her forehead rested upon the cold, dank hands which prisoned hers against the labouring heart beneath.

He spoke again, hurriedly and excitedly now, but the coherency of his narrative was at an end.

‘Some day,’ he babbled hurriedly, ‘she shall know—my sweet, pure angel—what—who says that?—a lie—pure—pure as heaven above. No—never take her

hand in mine—a murderer's hand.—Hah! dog—at last. Mother—Lucy—it has eaten my heart away—what do you say—her disgrace? I tell you she is pure as those above—but there is his blood upon my hands. I cannot—dare not go to her now. What—they have found him? Yes, I know you—Caleb Kent—no use to struggle—there—wretch—venomous hound—down into the black slime. Dead? Who said that? I did not know till I loosened my grasp. There, amongst the cotton rushes—my hands all wet and numbed—blood? No, the cold, black bog water. I killed him—I did not know till he was dead, mother. There, dear, I have told you. Nearly two years now. Let them find him. For her sake I could not speak. Can you say, dear, that it was guilt? There—some day she must know—some day, when we are old and grey, and life's passions have burned to their sad, grey ashes, and once more I can tell her how I loved.'

He was silent again, and Glynne tried to raise her head, but he held it fast pressed down to his labouring breast. Then, feebly and hurriedly, he went on,—

'These figures—all wrong—I cannot—so vast—so grand. Who's this?'

'I, Moray, my own, own love,' she whispered, as she clung to him wildly now.

'Ah!'

One long, deep sigh of content.

'Some day—I must tell you—but look—there—so far—so vast—so grand—the dazzling stars—the tiny

glittering point—then the faint golden dust—and beyond—the infinite. Who spoke? Glynne? Forgive me, dear—I loved you—so—'

‘Help! help!’

Wild, agonised shrieks, and there were hurried footsteps. Mother, sister, and a light, which gleamed upon dilated eyes, gazing straight up into the infinite he had so long tried to pierce.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAST LOOK AROUND.

ABOUT two years after his marriage, Philip Oldroyd was some five miles from home on the capital cob, a present from Sir John, one of his own breeding, when temptation fell in his way, for the Queen's hounds came along in full cry, and after them a very full field.

‘I must have a gallop for once in a way,’ said the doctor, and, yielding to the temptation, away he went, till, feeling he had done enough, he was about to draw rein, when he saw that something was wrong on his left. Cantering up, he was directly after one of a group helping to free a lady from her fallen horse, which was struggling frantically to extricate itself from a ditch into which both had come down.

A gate was brought, the lady borne to the nearest cottage, and Oldroyd's services eagerly accepted.

‘Badly injured,’ he said, after a rapid examination. ‘Someone had better ride over and get a carriage from the nearest place—an open carriage in which a hurdle and mattress can be laid. I'll stay and do my best, but I should telegraph to town for Sir Randall

Bray. An operation will be necessary. Are any of the lady's friends here ?'

'No ; but I saw Major Rolph leading the field half-an-hour ago. This is Mrs Rolph.'

Oldroyd started, and bent down over the insensible woman for a moment, at the same time softly pressing back the thick, dark hair from her clammy brow, and there were the lineaments he had not before recognised ; it was the face of the keeper's daughter, softened and refined, though now terribly drawn with pain.

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'Yes, doctor, she's gettin' over it,' said Hayle, one day when Oldroyd met him close to Brackley. 'But she's had a near shave. It's you, though, as saved her life, same as you did mine.'

'I'm glad she's better, I'm sure,' said Oldroyd. 'And you—do you ever feel your old wound ?'

'Oh, yes, just a twinge or two when the weather changes. But Sir John's very kind, and things go very easy with me now, thanks to you, sir—thanks to you.'

'Oh, all right, Hayle, all right. Got a good show of pheasants this winter ? Plenty left ?'

'Heaps, sir. Oh, you may trust me. I look pretty sharp after 'em, I can tell you. I know, I do.'

The great dark fellow gave a solemn wink as he stood before Oldroyd, in his brown velveteen coat and buttons, with a capital double gun under his arm.

‘Yes, I suppose you do,’ said the doctor. ‘Game-keeping is better than poaching, eh?’

‘When you’ve got a good master, sir. But, look here, sir, when are you coming over? Sir John said you were last week.’

‘As soon as I can; too busy yet.’

‘When you do, sir, you shall have as fine a bit o’ shooting as a gentleman could wish to have. Talk about a warm corner, sir; it shall be the best in the whole preserves.’

‘Well, I’m glad your daughter is getting better. Is there any prospect of her coming down here?’

‘Not a bit, sir, and I don’t know as I want her. They don’t want me, and I don’t want them. You see I’m not a fool, doctor. I know well enough that if I went seeing ’em, it would look bad before the servants. I shouldn’t be comfortable. I should want to go down in the kitchen to have my meals, so I don’t go.’

‘Perhaps it is wise,’ said Oldroyd.

‘I’m sure it is, sir. He’s made a lady of her, and, of course, he couldn’t make a gentleman of me. Judy sends me some money now and then, but I allus have it sent back. I couldn’t take his money. He don’t like me, and has never forgiven me, and I don’t like him. Poor lass! She’d have done better and been happier if she’d stopped at home, and took to some stout young chap of our lot.’

‘Poacher?’

‘Well, no, sir,’ said the great dark fellow, smiling grimly; ‘keeper, sir. There’s not many poachers about here now. I told all I knowed as they must clear out, for I meant to do my dooty; and they saw that it was sense, for there’d be no chance for them again a man as knowed as much as I did, so they went off.’

‘By the way, Hayle,’ said the doctor, ‘didn’t you go to the major on the day before his appointed wedding?’

‘Night, sir, night? I went to him straight as soon as I knew it for certain; but it was days before I could get to him. When I did get face to face with him, I says, “It’s my Judith, captain,” I says, “or one of us is going to be hung for this night’s work.” He blustered a bit, and tried to frighten me; but he couldn’t do that; and when he found I meant mischief, he gave in. He swore he’d marry her, but he cheated me then. Next time I got hold of him, there was no nonsense, I can tell you. He rang for his man to fetch the police, and I went off; but he never stirred after that without seeing me watching him, and at last he gave in out of sheer fright, and come to where I’d got Judith waiting, and he married her. If he hadn’t, I’d have—’

The man’s lips tightened, and he involuntarily cocked the double gun he carried, but only to lower it once more beneath his arm.

‘I’m not a boasting man, sir,’ said the keeper huskily; ‘but I loved that gal, and the man who did

her harm was no better than so much varmin to me. I should have stopped at nothing, sir; I was that wound up. He'd give me nothing but treachery, leading my gal astray, making her lie and say she was going to nurse the old granny out there on the common, when it was only to go off in the woods to him. I told him of it all, and that I was a father—her father. I told him a rat would fight for its young, and that if he expected, because I was a common man, I was not going to do my duty by my gal, he was mistaken.

“Why, what will you do?” he says.

“Do?” I says to him; “do you think I’ve forgotten that you shot me down out there in the fir wood that night?”

“It was an accident,” he says.

“It was no accident,” I says. “There was light enough for me to see you take aim at me; and then, when I was lying half dead there in my bed, you took advantage of it to lead my child away. It’s no use for you to pretend you didn’t know. She told you fast enough that I was lying there, and that made it safe.”

“Look here, sir,” I says at last, “there shall be no more shilly-shally between you and me. As I say, I’ll let bygones be bygones, if you’ll do the right thing. If you don’t—well, p’r’aps it won’t be this year, nor next year. My chance will come some day, and then—”

There was a pause, and Oldroyd marked the strange

glare in the keeper's eyes as he drew in his breath with a loud hiss.

'Yes, doctor,' he said, after looking round him for a few moments, as if in search of the object he named, 'he'd have been like so much varmin to me, and if he hadn't married my poor lass, I should have shot him as I would a stoat.'

Time ran on after its fashion, but few changes took place at Brackley. Sir John Day used to thank Oldroyd for introducing to him the best keeper who ever stepped, for Hayle was the higher in favour from his being a man who was a capital judge of stock, and one who could keep a good eye upon the farm when the squire went away year by year for a long stay abroad. When at home, Glynne was her uncle's constant companion in his botanical walks, and these generally ended in her being left at the cottage where Mrs Alleyne, widowed of son as well as husband, took up her residence in full view of the gloomy old Firs, lately taken by a famous astronomer, who vastly altered the former occupant's position by his eagerness to acquire Moray Alleyne's costly instruments which had been carefully cared for by his mother's hands.

At The Warren, Mrs Rolph, grown careworn and grey, resided still with her niece for companion, her son never having been there since Marjorie was left to her despair. The servants were not above talking, and rumours reached Brackley Hall that Mrs Rolph had

cursed her son, and was never going to see him again, that it was a place no servant could stop in, for the old lady's temper was awful, and Miss Marjorie as mad as a March hare ; while even Oldroyd hinted to his wife, after being called in, that Miss Emlin was rather flighty and strange.

'They never go out anywhere,' he said ; 'and from what I saw, I should say they are always either quarrelling or making it up. Seem fond of one another though, all the same.'

'But what do you mean by flighty and strange ?' said Lucy. 'You don't mean ready to flirt with men ?'

Oldroyd burst into a hearty laugh, and caught up his youngest child.

'Don't be alarmed, he cried. 'Never will I be false to thee. How does the song go ? She's got the complaint that ladies have who have been crossed in love as folks call it. Seriously, dear, I should not be surprised if she did turn a little crazy.'

'Oh, Phil ; how horrible !'

'Yes ; my dear,' he said seriously, but with a humorous twinkle in his eye ; 'I understand these things. I knew a young doctor once who very nearly became a candidate for a private asylum.'

'Phil !—Yes ; what is it ?'

'Messenger, ma'am, from Brackley. Would master be kind enough to step over.'

Oh, Phil, dear ; Glynne is ill,' cried Lucy, pite-

ously. 'I had a presentiment last night. Here, I'll take the children over to mamma, and come with you.'

'Wait a moment,' cried Oldroyd, and he ran out to speak to Sir John's groom and came back.

'All right,' he said. 'No one ill? Something about Hayle the keeper the man says. Wanted directly.'

'Poor fellow's wound has broken out again,' thought Oldroyd, as he jumped into the dog-cart the groom had waiting, and he questioned the man, who only knew that the keeper had come in to see Sir John that morning, and then he had been sent off to fetch the doctor.'

'Terrible dry time, sir,' said the man as the horse sped along toward the park. 'We out of the stables had all to go and help the gardeners two whole days watering.'

'Yes ; the crops are suffering badly, my man.'

'They just are, sir. The lake's half empty, and the fish getting sick, and Hayle says the boggy bits beyond the park where they get the snipe in winter's nearly all dried up.'

'The conversation ended as the dog-cart was rattled up the lime avenue, and there, at the great porch, stood Sir John, the major, and Hayle the keeper.'

'Morning! Glad you've come,' said Sir John, shaking hands. 'That will do, Smith.'

The groom, who was eager to know what was the

matter, drove sulkily round to the stables, while Sir John took the doctor's arm.

'Look here, Oldroyd,' he said; 'the keeper has made a discovery in the bog wood over yonder.'

'Poacher shot!' exclaimed the doctor.

'Wait and see,' said Sir John, who was looking pallid; while the major had a peculiarly stern look in his fierce face.

Oldroyd bowed, and they walked rapidly across the park, and through some of the preserves. Then in and out among the pines till an open moorland patch was reached, dotted here and there with scrubby pines, and here Sir John turned.

'Now, Hayle,' he said; 'you lead.'

The keeper went in front, and Sir John followed; while the major came abreast of the doctor.

'We thought it better to have you with us, doctor, whispered the major. 'It's a terrible business—a clearing up of a sad event from what I can see.'

Oldroyd felt more mystified than ever, but he was soon to be illumined, for the keeper led them over the dry cotton rushes and rustling reeds to a dried up pool, half in the open, half hidden by a dense growth of alder.

Here he paused and pointed.

'On yonder, Sir John, about fifty yards.'

The baronet walked straight forward, parting the growth with his stout stick, till he stopped short at the edge of a dried up pool, where the first thing

Oldroyd saw was Marjorie Emlin seated on the edge, where a wiry tuft of rushes grew, with her feet amongst the dried confervæ and crowfoot at the bottom of the pool. She had taken off her hat, and the sun turned her rich, tawny, red hair to gold as she bent over something which glittered in her hands; and this she transferred to one wrist as they came up.

It was not till they were close beside her that she turned her head, and nodded and smiled in a childish, vacant way, and then held up the glittering bracelet upon her wrist for them to admire.

‘Better speak to her,’ whispered Sir John. ‘Hayle says she’s quite mad.’

Oldroyd stooped and picked up the hat and handed it to the girl.

‘The sun is very powerful,’ he said; ‘had you not better put it on.’

She snatched the hat with childish petulance, and then held up the bracelet again.

‘It’s the one she gave to Glynne,’ said Sir John involuntarily.

Marjorie looked at him sharply, and then pointed down at something covered partially by the dried scum of the pool.

‘Quick, for God’s sake, get her away, Oldroyd!’ whispered the major, stepping between the wretched woman and the ghastly remains at her feet.

The task did not prove an easy one, for Majorie resented the doctor’s interference, and seemed deter-

mined to stay, but suddenly turned upon her heel and walked away, looking back once to smile and nod at the group standing by the bed of the dried up pool.

‘I found her here, sir, this morning, soon after breakfast, and tried to persuade her to come away,’ said Hayle; ‘but, poor girl, she didn’t seem to know me a bit, and I didn’t like to go and tell Mrs Rolph, for I’m afraid she’s crazed.’

‘He came on and told us, Oldroyd,’ said Sir John; ‘and we thought it would be better to have you here. How long is it since you were by here, Hayle?’

‘Close upon three weeks, Sir John,’ said the keeper; ‘and there was a little water left in the pool then. Shall I try and find out who it is?’

Sir John looked at the remains with horror.

‘Better leave it to the police,’ he said. They must be told, of course. Try, though, if there are any means of identification, and pick up the loose cases. Jem,’ he whispered, with a look of horror, ‘has judgment come upon this man as we see?’

The major made no reply, but eagerly watched the keeper who picked up case after case, rotted and stained by the mud in which they had lain. These were placed together, and then Hayle stooped to cut open a discoloured piece of velveteen which had once been brown.

From this he extracted a rusty knife, and a tobacco-box of brass, which set all at rest directly, for Hayle held the latter before Sir John.

‘Don’t want any further search to find out that, Sir John,’ he said sharply. ‘A man has been missing from these parts for years now, and there’s his name.’

Sir John looked at the tarnished metal box, with a shudder of disgust and horror for the memories it revived, and read there roughly scratched upon the lid—‘Caleb Kent.’

‘Remember what I said to you one day, Lucy?’ said Oldroyd, about a year later. ‘I think it was that day when I was called over to Brackley about something being found.’

‘Oh, Phil, don’t bring that up,’ cried Lucy, with a shudder; ‘but what do you mean?’

‘About Miss Emlin. I’ve just come from there.’

‘Yes, dear. Some fresh trouble?’

He nodded his head gravely.

‘They’ve taken her to a private asylum. I did not say anything to you before, for fear of upsetting you, but she was not fit to be left with poor old Mrs Rolph, and she has tried to drown herself twice.’

THE END.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
FORTHCOMING BOOKS,	2
POETRY,	13
GENERAL LITERATURE,	15
THEOLOGY,	17
LEADERS OF RELIGION,	18
WORKS BY S. BARING GOULD,	19
FICTION,	21
NOVEL SERIES,	24
BOOKS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS,	25
THE PEACOCK LIBRARY,	26
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SERIES,	26
SOCIAL QUESTIONS OF TO-DAY,	28
CLASSICAL TRANSLATIONS,	29
COMMERCIAL SERIES,	29
WORKS BY A. M. M. STEDMAN, M.A.,	30
SCHOOL EXAMINATION SERIES,	32
PRIMARY CLASSICS,	32

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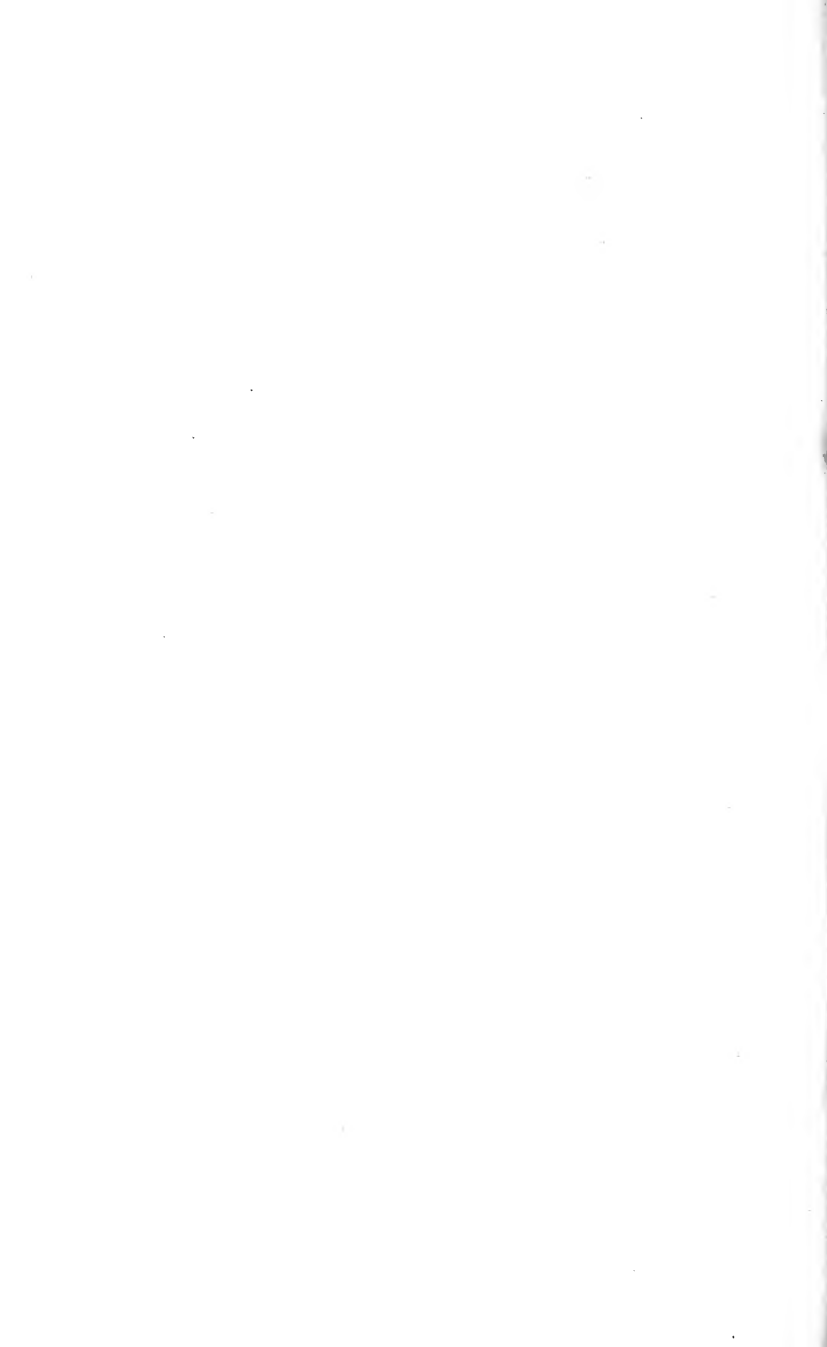
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